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TORONTO

# TABLE OF CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN POETS

## From 1688–1788.

| England. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|
| **Whig Panegyrical Poets** | | |
| Charles Montague | 1661 | 1715 |
| Joseph Addison | 1672 | 1719 |
| John Hughes | 1677 | 1720 |
| Thomas Tickell | 1686 | 1740 |
| **Whig and Tory Poets: Heroic, Mock-Heroic, Didactic Verse** | | |
| Richard Blackmore | (after) 1650 | 1729 |
| Samuel Garth | 1661 | 1719 |
| John Philips | 1676 | 1708 |
| **Familiar Style of Verse** | | |
| Matthew Prior | 1664 | 1721 |
| George Granville | 1667 | 1735 |
| John Pomfret | 1667 | 1702 |
| William Walsh | 1673 | 1708 |
| Jonathan Swift | 1667 | 1745 |
| John Gay | 1685 | 1732 |
| **Alexander Pope** | 1688 | 1744 |
| **Ethical School of Pope** | | |
| Thomas Parnell | 1679 | 1717 |
| Richard Savage | 1697 | 1743 |
| Samuel Johnson | 1709 | 1784 |
| Oliver Goldsmith | 1728 | 1774 |
| William Falconer | 1736 | 1769 |
| **Decadent Satirists** | | |
| Charles Churchill | 1731 | 1764 |
| John Wolcot | 1738 | 1819 |
| **Translators of the Classics** | | |
| Thomas Creech | 1659 | 1700 |
| Nicholas Rowe | 1674 | 1718 |
| Elijah Fenton | 1683 | 1730 |
| William Broome | 1689 | 1745 |
| Christopher Pitt | 1699 | 1748 |
| Gilbert West | 1703 | 1756 |
| **Dramatists** | | |
| Thomas Southerne | 1660 | 1746 |
| William Congreve | 1670 | 1729 |
| Edmund Smith | 1668 | 1710 |
| Joseph Addison | 1672 | 1719 |
| Ambrose Philips | 1675 | 1749 |
| Edward Young | 1681 | 1765 |

| England (*continued*). | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|
| **Philosophical Poets** | | |
| Edward Young | 1681 | 1765 |
| James Thomson | 1700 | 1748 |
| John Dyer | 1700 | 1758 |
| David Mallet | 1700 | 1763 |
| John Armstrong | 1709 | 1779 |
| Mark Akenside | 1721 | 1770 |
| **Religious Poets** | | |
| Isaac Watts | 1674 | 1748 |
| John Wesley | 1703 | 1791 |
| Charles Wesley | 1707 | 1788 |
| Christopher Smart | 1722 | 1770 |
| William Cowper | 1731 | 1800 |
| **Early Romantic School** | | |
| Allan Ramsay | 1686 | 1756 |
| William Somervile | 1679 | 1742 |
| William Hamilton of Bangour | 1704 | 1754 |
| George Lyttelton | 1709 | 1773 |
| Antony Hammond | 1710 | 1742 |
| William Shenstone | 1714 | 1763 |
| Thomas Gray | 1716 | 1771 |
| William Collins | 1721 | 1759 |
| Joseph Warton | 1722 | 1797 |
| Thomas Warton | 1728 | 1790 |
| William Mickle | 1735 | 1788 |
| James Macpherson | 1736 | 1796 |
| Michael Bruce | 1746 | 1767 |
| John Logan | 1748 | 1788 |
| Thomas Chatterton | 1752 | 1770 |
| Lady Anne Lindsay | 1750 | 1825 |
| **Dramatists (*continued*)** | | |
| Elijah Fenton | 1683 | 1745 |
| John Gay | 1685 | 1732 |
| Henry Brooke | 1703 | 1783 |
| Samuel Johnson | 1709 | 1784 |
| John Home | 1722 | 1808 |

| France. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|
| Bernard de Fontenelle | 1657 | 1757 |
| Jean Baptiste Rousseau | 1670 | 1741 |
| Houdar de la Motte | 1672 | 1731 |
| Alexis Piron | 1689 | 1773 |
| François Arouet de Voltaire | 1694 | 1778 |
| Jean Baptiste Gresset | 1709 | 1777 |
| Jean François de Saint Lambert | 1716 | 1803 |
| Ponse Denis Lebrun | 1729 | 1807 |
| Antoine Thomas | 1732 | 1785 |
| Jacques Delille | 1733 | 1813 |
| Jean Antoine Roucher | 1745 | 1794 |
| Nicolas Gilbert | 1751 | 1780 |
| Evariste Désiré Parny | 1753 | 1814 |
| André Chenier | 1762 | 1794 |
| Marie Joseph Chenier | 1764 | 1811 |
| **Dramatists** | | |
| Prosper Crebillon | 1674 | 1763 |
| Pierre Marivaux | 1688 | 1763 |
| François Arouet de Voltaire | 1694 | 1778 |
| Jean François Ducis | 1733 | 1816 |

| Italy. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|
| Giovanni Battista Zaffi | 1667 | 1719 |
| Giovanni Battista Casti | 1721 | 1803 |
| Giuseppe Parini | 1729 | 1799 |
| Giovanni Mali | 1740 | 1815 |
| **Dramatists** | | |
| Apostolo Zeno | 1668 | 1750 |
| Scipione Maffei | 1675 | 1755 |
| Pietro Metastasio | 1698 | 1782 |
| Carlo Gozzi | 1720 | 1808 |
| Vittorio Alfieri | 1749 | 1803 |

| Spain. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|
| Pedro de Regnosa | *fl.* | 1727 |
| Pedro de Barnuevo | *fl.* | 1732 |
| Francisco Boletto Moraes | *fl.* | 1734 |
| Jose Gerardo de Herbas | *fl.* | 1737 |
| Miguel de Zevallos | *fl.* | 1738 |
| Eugenio Lobo | *fl.* | 1738 |
| Benegari y Luxan | *fl.* | 1743 |
| Ignacio de Luzan | 1702 | 1754 |
| Vicente Garcia de la Huerta | 1730 | 1787 |
| Nicola Fernando Moratin | 1737 | 1780 |
| Jose de Cadahalso | 1741 | 1782 |
| Felix Maria de Samaniego | 1745 | 1801 |
| Thomas de Yriarte | 1750 | 1791 |
| Leon de Arroyal | *fl.* | 1784 |
| **Dramatists** | | |
| None. | | |

| Germany. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|
| Johann Christian Günther | 1695 | — |
| Johann Jacob Bodmer | 1698 | 1783 |
| Johann Christoph Gottsched | 1700 | 1766 |
| Friedrich von Hagedorn | 1708 | 1754 |
| Albrecht von Haller | 1708 | 1777 |
| Ewald Christian von Kleist | 1715 | 1759 |
| Christian Furchtegott Gellert | 1716 | 1769 |
| Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Glein | 1719 | 1803 |
| Johann Peter Uz | 1720 | 1796 |
| Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock | 1724 | 1803 |
| Friedrich Wilhelm Zachariä | 1726 | 1777 |
| Gotthold Ephraim Lessing | 1729 | 1781 |
| Salomon Gessner | 1730 | 1788 |
| Christoph Martin Wieland | 1733 | 1813 |
| **Dramatists** | | |
| Elias Schlegel | — | 1749 |
| Christian Felix Weisse | 1726 | 1804 |
| Gotthold Ephraim Lessing | 1729 | 1781 |

# A HISTORY

OF

# ENGLISH POETRY

BY

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THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN ENGLISH POETRY
EFFECTS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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## CHAPTER XIV

### CONCLUSION

Reasons for confining the History to the period between Chaucer and Scott: Gradual Evolution of English Society and English Poetry from mediaeval institutions: Alienation in recent times of English Poetry from social life and action: The Future of English Society and English Poetry.

# ERRATA IN VOLUMES III. IV. V.

## Vol. III

Page 40, line 2, *for* "Let us rise and part!" *read* "let us kiss and part!"
Page 43, line 14, *for* "Let us rise and part!" *read* "let us kiss and part!"
Page 74, line 22, *for* "Christ's College, Cambridge" *read* "King's College, Cambridge."
Page 127, line 18, *for* "Hervey" *read* "Harvey."
Page 154, line 17, for *Cours d'Amours* read *Cours d'Amour.*
Page 155, line 22, for *Cours d'Amours* read *Cours d'Amour.*
Page 198, line 36, *for* "strengh" *read* "strength."
Page 207, line 17, *for* "Vain main" *read* "Vain man."
Page 217, line 31, *delete* sentence beginning, "I fear it is only too evident," etc.
Page 249, lines 8, 9, *for* "After the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1641, he contrived, etc." *read* "After the meeting of the Long Parliament he contrived in 1641," etc.
Page 257, line 23, *for* "Bacchanial" *read* "Bacchanalial."
Page 272, line 18, *for* "In 1639, when the King summoned his third Parliament," *read* "In 1640, when the King summoned his fourth Parliament."
Page 335, lines 29, 30, for "*The Cutter of Coleman Street*" read "*Cutter of Coleman Street.*"
Page 337, lines 21 and 31, for "*The Cutter of Coleman Street*" read "*Cutter of Coleman Street.*"
Page 381, line 23, *delete* "Abraham Cowley."
Page 394, line 20, *for* "in the book of *Paradise Lost*" read "in the eighth book," etc.
Page 414, last line, "By Lancelot, etc." *delete* "By."
Page 521, line 4, *for* "never again to set foot, etc." *read* "only once again, and for a few weeks, to set foot," etc.

## Vol. IV

Page 27, line 3, "In his will, etc." *delete* this and the following sentence. They contain a serious mistake. Several correspondents have pointed out to me that the words cited do not occur in Shakespeare's will. As my attention has been mainly occupied with tracing the development of the history of poetical thought and style, I have relied, as a rule, for the record of biographical *facts*, on authorities which appeared to me trustworthy. I much regret that in this instance, by accepting a statement without verification, I should have given fresh currency to an error, the original source of which I have since vainly endeavoured to trace.
Page 65, line 21, *for* "seem to culminate" *read* "seems, etc."
Page 71, line 1, *for* "adopt" *read* "adapt."
Page 74, line 6, *for* "lie all right" *read* "lie all night."
Page 91, line 13, *for* "in his" *read* "is his."

Page 323, line 36, *for* "Arbaces" *read* "Archas."
Page 337, line 10, *for* "the substitution for" *read* "the change from."
Page 349, line 6, *for* "generosi filus" *read* "generosi filius."
Page 433, line 23, *for* "1590" *read* "1690."
Page 469, line 41, *for* "*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*" *read* "*Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age.*"

VOL. V

Page 50, line 27, *for* "No *words* o'erturned" *read* "No *worlds* o'erturned."
Page 99, line 19, *for* "*whom* my heart doth enthral" *read* "*who* my heart doth enthral."
Page 393, line 29, *for* "The latter" *read* "The former."

# CHAPTER I

## THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE: THE RENAISSANCE: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

ON the 1st of August 1806 Napoleon Bonaparte's envoy announced to the German Diet that his master no longer recognised the existence of the Holy Roman Empire; and the Emperor Francis having, on the 6th of the same month, declared his resignation of the Imperial dignity, the Empire disappeared from the view of history.[1] This striking event seems to have been witnessed with general indifference. As some ancient and picturesque mansion which, continuing to stand long after its timbers have become worm-eaten and rotten, suddenly collapses in the silence of night, and men to whom it has been a familiar object all their lives at first miss it, but soon accustom themselves to the new buildings that rise upon the site of the ruin, so, while the imagination of the world was absorbed by the spectacle of time-honoured dynasties overthrown, of the blood of monarchs shed upon the public scaffold, of mighty battles by land and sea, the most venerable secular institution of Europe passed out of existence almost unnoticed, and the place thereof knew it no more.

Had it fallen twenty years earlier, in the time of international peace, before the revival of the States-General of France had burst the frail dykes that kept off the waves of Revolution, the disappearance of the Power which, for more than a thousand years, had in theory

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire* (1907), p. 409.

claimed to be paramount over all the kingdoms of the earth must have aroused strong imaginative emotions. Viewed in the light of reason, no doubt its sounding titles had no correspondence with the realities of things. A witty epigram, which has been ascribed to Voltaire,[1] declared with truth that it was neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire. It was not Holy, for the alliance between Pope and Emperor, by which it was originally consecrated, had been violently terminated while it was still in its infancy. It was not Roman, for the Imperial power had for centuries been vested in German families. It was not an Empire, for the sovereigns of the independent nations of Europe had almost from the first derided its claims to their allegiance. Nevertheless, having regard to the aims of its great founder, it might be said to have been justified in its pretensions. It was the archetype and emblem of primitive Unity to a number of powerful races which, divided from each other by character and history, still recognised a common heritage of religion, morals, and art. The mirror of their unity might be shivered into a thousand fragments, but each of these fragments, in the varied constitutions of the great kingdoms of Europe, reflected, to a certain extent, the same kind of political ideas that had inspired the genius of Charlemagne, when he endeavoured to combine them in one system as members of the Christian Republic.

Nor was this all. The constitution of the Holy Roman Empire had provided a groundwork for all the art and letters of modern Europe. Its history is written in the varying styles of Church Architecture. The triumph of the Catholic Church over an effete Paganism appears in the appropriation of the civil Roman basilica to the purposes of ecclesiastical worship: her victorious advance among the Teutonic barbarians is symbolised by the arched and soaring aisles of many a cathedral to the north of the

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire* (1907), p. 212. I cannot trace it to Voltaire. My friend, Mr. P. F. Willert, tells me that he thinks the groundwork of the epigram is probably to be found in the old German saying: "Das heilige römische Reich ist weder heilig, römisch noch reich"—a pun on the last word being intended.

Alps. The genius of painting has depicted the general allegory of the Holy Roman Empire in a chapter-house at Florence, and the idea of its joint sacred and secular constitution in the Mosaic of the Lateran Palace.[1] Above all, the drama of its existence finds an imaginative representation in the pages of poetry and romance. Not only has the theory of its constitution been expounded by Dante in prose and verse; not only is it recognised in the Tales of Chaucer as framing the order of social life; but the aspect in which it appeared to the men of the Renaissance may be discovered alike in the burlesque romances of Rabelais, in the irony of Ariosto, and in the satire of Cervantes. The history of modern European poetry furnishes to the spiritual antecedents of the French Revolution a key, which, to be properly applied, demands a knowledge of the continuous tradition that joins, on the one side, the Renaissance to the Holy Roman Empire, and, on the other, the Holy Roman Empire to the Rome of the Caesars.[2]

The Holy Roman Empire was, in fact, the gradual product of a variety of general causes, connected with the ruin of the system of Hellenic civilisation presided over by ancient Rome. Of these the principal were the decay of the religion of the pagan world; the substitution in its place of Christianity as the established religion in the universal Roman Empire; the overthrow of the Empire by the barbarians; the anarchy subsequently prevailing through several centuries; the revival of the Empire by the joint action of Pope Leo and Charlemagne in the person of the latter; and the combination of the remains of the old Roman municipal administration with the customs and institutions of the conquering barbarians, by the introduction of the feudal principle in the tenure of land.

By the same gradual process through which the Holy Roman Empire had been constructed it was in following ages dissolved, and through a like series of causes; namely, the growth of the principle of Nationality, neces-

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*, pp. 115-17. [2] Vol. i. pp. 13-14.

sarily involving the destruction of the unity of Imperial administration; the rupture between its coequal rulers, the Pope and the Emperor; the antagonism between the civil institutions of the old Roman Empire and the feudal and ecclesiastical order by which these had been overlaid; and the revived study of classical literature, inspired as this was by civil ideas opposed in their essence to the feudal and ecclesiastical principles of mediaeval scholasticism. Such was the drama of the Holy Roman Empire, as it is presented in the modern and mediaeval History of Europe, and as the spirit of its successive Acts is reflected in the greatest monuments of European Poetry. Its development may be viewed in the literatures of Italy, Spain, France, and Germany; but the image of gradual change in the structure of European society is reproduced with especial vividness in the History of England, where, owing to the insular position of the country, the mixture of races contained in it, and the passion for freedom by which each of these races has been animated, the evolution of the nation out of the mediaeval into the modern order is revealed distinctly at each stage of its progress. Hence, in a History of English Poetry which covers a period between the age of Chaucer and the age of Scott, it has been the purpose of the writer to trace the development of our metrical literature as reflected in the growth of English society from its mediaeval beginnings to modern times.

The first volume dealt with the embryonic processes by which, in the midst of Catholic surroundings, was formed a nucleus of general ideas and language fitted to become the groundwork of the metrical art. It showed how, on a dialect of the dominant Saxon vocabulary, the invention of the Anglo-Norman poet imposed metrical forms derived from France, and imaginative conceptions reflecting feudal and ecclesiastical forms of life; and how, in course of time, these elements were developed by Chaucer into the comprehensive picture of living society presented in *The Canterbury Tales*. We saw too, reflected in the allegory of *Piers the Plowman*, the dominant tendency

of the nation to break away in spiritual matters from the central authority of the Pope. The silent decay of the institution of Chivalry was noted in the changing forms of allegorical poetry, the immediate product of mediaeval genius: on the other hand, the advance of the infant drama from the purely ecclesiastical Miracle Play to the more secular interest of the Morality, pointed to the growing predominance of the civil over the ecclesiastical element in the constitution of society.

In the four following volumes I have endeavoured to describe the gradual rise of a body of national poetry, mainly inspired by the genius of the Renaissance, out of a series of intellectual conflicts, caused in the heart of the nation by its severance from the central European system—the conflict, that is to say, between Catholicism and Protestantism, between Feudalism and Civil Law, between ancient Absolutism and the rising spirit of Democracy; in a word, between the forces of Liberty and those of Authority. In this concluding volume our gaze must be turned once more from the contemplation of a purely national development to the spectacle of the general movement of things in Europe at large. The course of our narrative has brought us to the eve of the French Revolution. The Holy Roman Empire, symbol of the Mediaeval Order of Civilisation, is still standing, reminding us at once, by its historic titles and its altered structure, of the vast and momentous changes which have been wrought in European society since the early days of the institution. In the Continental kingdoms one of two political phenomena may be everywhere noted: either the civil element, in the shape of Monarchical Absolutism, has obtained the mastery over the feudal and ecclesiastical elements, as in France; or, as in Germany, the feudal and ecclesiastical elements have deprived the central Imperial power of all capacity for united national action. In either case, the great middle classes of each Continental nation are excluded from all share of *political* liberty. Among these classes the Renaissance has developed a widespread self-consciousness; and imagination, since it can find no outlet in social

and political action, takes the introspective course noticeable in fictions like Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* and Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther*, or in dramas like Schiller's *Robbers*.

The same tendency may be observed on the eve of the French Revolution in English literature, but in a greatly modified form, since in England political liberty, arising from the Revolution of 1688, has been allowed a large area for its operations; and though the middle classes are still excluded from all direct share in the conduct of affairs, yet, as has been said, the Renaissance has done much to compose the conflict between the ancient civil and ecclesiastical principles in the Constitutional Order, and to produce a balance in the government of King, Lords, and Commons. This equilibrium is now imperilled by the great social upheaval on the Continent. I shall endeavour in the following chapters to show the expansion of the centrifugal tendencies of the English imagination in the eighteenth century into the revolutionary forces of the nineteenth. As in France, under a despotic *régime*, the Renaissance—which, up to a certain point, had helped to direct the French genius into creative channels of thought and expression—prepared the conditions of social destruction, so we shall see in England the weakened power of the historic Parties encouraging a revolt, alike against the oligarchic forms of government established since 1688, and against that ideal of Classical "Correctness," whereby the representative writers of the first half of the eighteenth century had striven to bring order out of the anarchy characterising English poetry in the days of the Restoration.[1]

[1] As to the political and poetical genius of the eighteenth century in England, see vol. v. chap. xiv.

## CHAPTER II

### RECIPROCITY OF IMAGINATIVE INTERCOURSE BETWEEN ENGLAND AND THE CONTINENT DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By the close of the seventeenth century the Renaissance may be said to have completed its twofold function of awakening the civil or national genius in the different countries of the Continent of Europe, and adapting the language and literature of each, as far as it was possible to do so, to the civic standards of classical antiquity.[1] In most of these nations the direct classical influence now ceased to be operative. Italy and Spain had been the first to feel its power and to propagate its ideas among their neighbours. The former, through her architects and painters, had given a great impulse to the art of France since the reign of Francis I.; and her romantic poets from Pulci to Ariosto had stimulated the still lingering spirit of chivalry in England to a remarkable effort of invention in the allegory of *The Faery Queene.* Spain, in the sixteenth century the most powerful nation in Europe, and *par excellence* the land of chivalrous romance, had felt her genius quickened by the movement of the Renaissance to give artistic expression to her old pastoral ideals in the *Diana Enamorada* of Montemayor: thence had come the spirit that woke corresponding fancies in the heart of Sir Philip Sidney, to be expressed in the *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*; on the other hand, the penetrating imagination of Cervantes had been inspired by the

[1] As to this double function of the Renaissance, see vol. v. chap. i.

rationalism of the age with the immortal conception of *Don Quixote.* But both in Italy and Spain creative art had been crushed by the weight of Absolutism and the Inquisition, and (except on the stage of Spain where Freedom escaped into a kind of Fairyland) the movement of the Renaissance had died out in a series of mere external imitations of classical form.

In France the case was different. I showed in the last volume the results of the uncompromising vigour with which France had developed on parallel lines the principles of Monarchical centralisation and Classical exclusiveness.[1] The Crown had absorbed all the functions of the State, and, by suppressing the Huguenots and the powers of the provincial aristocracy, had dried up the springs of personal religion and local patriotism. Similarly, the movement of national classicism, initiated by Malherbe in poetry, had culminated in the rigid dictatorship of Boileau. There was no room for a further advance in either direction. After the death of Louis XIV. the centralised action of the Monarchy, enfeebled by a reacting Regency, became wavering and ambiguous ; while the Classical movement in literature ceased to be creative. Through the eighteenth century almost the only representatives in France of the old Classical principle were Voltaire and Delille, neither of whom made any real advance in that course of creation, which consisted in refining native originality by the standards of Classical taste. On the other hand, the tendency to revolt against Classical authority showed itself in the pert depreciation of Greek and Latin models by Charles Perrault, in his *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*, the object of which was to prove that the models for good writing in all kinds need not be studied farther back than the reign of Louis XIV.

Perrault's arrogant literary Gallicism had a superficial justification. The brilliance of the greater part of Louis XIV.'s reign turned the eyes of all Europe to the French Court as the mirror of politeness and refinement. Its

[1] Vol. v. pp. 11-15.

absolutist fashions were copied with equal servility in the Courts of the English Restoration and of the petty German princes; and even after the Revolution of 1688 the decrees of the French critics were treated by English men of letters in a spirit of exaggerated humility. This respect was largely, and even justly, due to the perfection which the French language had acquired from the refinements given to it by the illustrious writers of the seventeenth century. French enjoyed a prestige nearly as universal as that of Greek in the days of the Antonines, or Latin on the eve of the Reformation. It was the accepted language of diplomacy; even despots like Frederick the Great in Berlin and Catherine of Russia in St. Petersburg bowed with deference before the men of letters whom they thought the best able to instruct them in the secret of its refinements.

This condition of things produced certain inevitable results. In the first place, the decline of personal initiative in the French monarchs removed the controlling influence in French literature from the Crown, and concentrated it in the literary class. In the second place, the despotic state of society turned the French genius from the course of creative invention, and developed it in a direction for which it had the highest qualifications, namely, critical and destructive analysis. In the third place, the same oppressive atmosphere tended to drive the imagination, from the external objects of action with which it had been hitherto engaged, into that course of introspective reflection which found its most brilliant and unhealthy exponent in Jean Jacques Rousseau. Out of these concurrent causes arose a literary atmosphere which was no longer purely national, but cosmopolitan. In it were generated alike the destructive wit of Voltaire, the anti-Christian didacticism of the Encyclopaedists, and the sentimentalism of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The united influence of these forces was brought to bear on the tottering fabric of European society, symbolised in the structure of the Holy Roman Empire. The leading authors of the new ideas, while they gave utterance to them in the dominant

French language, were by no means all of French extraction. Rousseau was Swiss, D'Holbach and Grimm German, Helvetius of Dutch ancestry. They appealed to all minds which, in whatever country, were carried on the tide of the Renaissance into violent conflict with the authority established by Feudal Absolutism and Catholic Tradition.

By a completely different route the German imagination in the latter half of the eighteenth century had developed in itself the same cosmopolitan and destructive tendencies as the French. When considering in the last volume the intellectual influence of the Renaissance on the several countries of Europe, I deliberately left Germany out of account,[1] but now that we have arrived at a period when the revolutionary spirit is seen to exercise a powerful influence on English taste, it becomes necessary to consider the elementary factors in the change contributed by the Teutonic genius.

Every student of the history of Germany has probably been impressed by one striking feature in it; namely, its antagonism to the power of Rome, and its rejection of Latin traditions in literature and art. The Germans never became the subjects of the Roman Empire: they produced the races that overthrew it. Charlemagne, the restorer of the titular Roman Empire, was a German; in spite of his title he remained in a truer sense the King of the Franks and representative of the customs and institutions of the conquering barbarians than Emperor of the Western world. When the vast fabric of his Empire under his feeble descendants parted into separate fragments, the Imperial title, passing by inheritance to sovereigns reigning on German soil, preserved the predominance of the Teutonic strain. The Emperor, though a German, was indeed the overlord of Italy; but all his instincts were opposed to the civic institutions of his Italian subjects. Antagonism to the Pope, the spiritual colleague of the Emperor in the mediaeval system, produced fresh opposition between the Latin and German

[1] For the reasons, see vol. v. p. 4.

elements in the Holy Roman Empire; throughout Germany, in a word, feudal and ecclesiastical forces tended constantly to prevail against the reviving civil genius, which was gaining the upper hand in the other countries of Europe.

This anti-Roman tendency in German history is clearly reflected in the course of German literature. Unlike the other languages of mediaeval Europe, the German was free from all mixture with Latin. "Let no living language," said Klopstock arrogantly, but, in a certain sense, justly, "venture to compare with the German. As it was in the oldest times when Tacitus describes it, so it still remains, solitary, unmixed, incomparable." In the oldest monuments preserved by that language this tradition is equally predominant. The *Nibelungenlied*, in its primaeval form, contains germs of the ancient Teutonic mythology; even its mediaeval form is coloured with legendary memories of the barbarian attack upon the Roman Empire. In the latter the heroes of the story are Burgundians, Goths, or Huns; Attila appears in it under the name of Etzel, Theodoric under the name of Dietrich; the names of the female personages are Teutonic; all the motives of conduct are simple, savage, unsophisticated. So too the action of other ancient German poems, like *Hildebrand and Hadubrand*, is based on the treatment of primitive complications, such as a combat between father and son, examples of which are found in stories current among other branches of the Aryan race—e.g. *Sohrab and Rustem*;[1] or on traditional ideas of family revenge, exemplified in stories resembling that of Alboin's murder by Rosamond. There is in these ancient poems no sign of that humane complexity of Romance which appears in the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*: the character of each poem, alike in conception and execution, is completely Teutonic.

Nevertheless, the neighbourhood of the Germans to the Roman Empire, when the nomad movement of their tribes ceased, did not fail to produce a certain refining effect upon their imagination. The superior art of the Latinised

[1] Robertson, *History of German Literature*, pp. 16-17.

portion of Charlemagne's dominions almost always gave the initiating impulse to the creative movements of German imagination, though not to the extent of subduing the Teutonic spirit, as was the case in the literature of peoples speaking the Romance languages. Thus the subjects of the early romances, originating in France, are copied in Germany. In some instances, as in the German version of *Flore et Blanchfleur* and the works of Gottfried von Strassburg, a poem is transferred from one language to the other by direct translation;[1] but in others the French form and matter become the starting-point for original treatment by some German poet. Chrestien de Troyes, for example, was the inspirer of the famous chivalric poet Wolfram von Eschenbach; the models of the Minnesingers were avowedly furnished by the Troubadours. Nothing, however, is more instructive than to observe how completely, in both cases, the spirit of the composition alters its character in migrating from the Latinised to the Teutonic people. The love-tales of the Arthurian cycle of Romance, in the hands of Wolfram von Eschenbach, lose altogether the *naïve* and positive style that they exhibit in the narrative of Chrestien de Troyes, and acquire instead a spiritual and exalted air; on the other hand, the refined chivalrous conceits of the Troubadours are exchanged, in the lyrics of Walther von der Vogelweide, for a natural, almost *bourgeois*, simplicity of thought, reflecting the domestic sentiment of the German race.

The effects of this antagonism of the Germans to Rome, and the consequent failure of the Italian Renaissance to acclimatise its civic influence in the German Empire, are most plainly seen in the German literature produced after the close of the Middle Ages. For while, in every kingdom of Western Europe that contained in its population a Latin element, or that had been affected by the institutions of Latin Christianity, the principle of nationality had made its way, under the guidance of a highly centralised Monarchy, against the disorganisation of the ancient

[1] Robertson, *History of German Literature*, pp. 50-54.

Feudalism, in Germany the constitution of the Imperial Government remained exclusively feudal. The several Orders of the Empire, the Princes, the Nobility, the Cities, and the Peasants, appeared as rival bodies, incapable of consolidation by the supreme but unsubstantial authority of the Emperor. There was as yet no centre in Germany round which the scattered forces of the popular imagination could rally to form a national ideal. Religion itself acted as a disintegrating power. By introducing religious schism the Reformation subdivided the already divided feudal society north of the Alps: out of the Reformation arose the Thirty Years' devastating Civil War; and when, at the Peace of Westphalia, the exhausted combatants, Catholic and Protestant, agreed to a cessation of arms on the sterile principle of negative toleration, Germany, as a nation, remained without any common goal to guide the aims of her statesmen and the invention of her poets. "Because," says Goethe, "in peace patriotism really consists in this, that every one sweeps his own door-step, minds his own business, learns his own lesson, that it may go well with his house, so did the feeling for Fatherland, excited by Klopstock, find no object on which it could exercise itself." [1] "Of the love of country"—Lessing, the illustrious pioneer of the essentially German movement in literature, admits—"I have no conception; it appears to me at best a heroic weakness which I am right glad to be without." [2]

Lacking a national and political channel of expression, the German imagination developed a spirit of extreme individuality; and this for the most part was directed by one of the two great external forces, Protestantism or Humanism. The Reformation roused among the German middle classes in town and country an intense feeling of personal religion, which, finding expression under the guidance of Luther, laid the foundations of the modern literary idiom of Germany. From Luther's age to that of the Seven Years' War, Hymnology became the most

[1] Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit.*
[2] Cited in Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire* (1907), p. 402.

popular form of German poetry; and the names of Gerhardt, Neander, and Gellert, among many others, show how instinctively during that period individual aspirations in the heart of the people sought utterance in religious lyrical verse. In the middle of the eighteenth century a colder current of pietism tended to formalise Protestant thought; and a literary movement, begun in the University of Zürich and grounded on Luther's doctrines, culminated in the production of Klopstock's *Messias*. Still later, as the impulse given by the Reformation weakened, the manly simplicity of Luther's sentiment gave place to a vague Pantheistic eclecticism, too impalpable for lucid expression in metrical language.

Humanism, operating in the disorganised society of the Holy Roman Empire, produced far more diversified effects in German literature than did the Reformation. For the latter movement, having its source in an instinctive revolt of the Teutonic race against the systematised order of the Roman Church, appealed directly to the popular intelligence; whereas the former owed its existence to the revival of ancient literature, and exerted its power mainly on the thought of the philosopher and the scholar. This class indeed was widely scattered over the country. When the movement of barbarous immigration spent its force, there sprang up through the length and breadth of Germany flourishing cities, in many of which Universities were established. But these were not powerful enough to impress a civic character on the Constitution of the Empire as a whole: hence, in the early days of the Revived Learning, the religious and literary forces of the movement worked in the city societies, uncontrolled by any central political guidance. The first impulses of German Humanism resembled those of Humanism in Italy, and, contrary to nature, instinctively obeyed the abstract literary tendency to set up Latin models as the standard of correct German writing. Academies for the promotion of this principle, imitating the Academy Della Crusca in Florence, were founded in Weimar, Nürnberg, and Stuttgart; while the theory of "correct-

ness" was defined by Martin Opitz (1597-1639) in his *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey.*

From these beginnings the classical stream of taste in Germany branched into two opposite channels. One of them, under the patronage of most of the German princes, and the leadership of Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), imitated the manners of the French court and the practice of the French stage; the other, directed by Winckelmann, Lessing, and Goethe, sought, more philosophically, to discover the principles underlying *Hellenic* art and poetry, and to apply them to their own national circumstances. This movement, based as it was on strict and scientific criticism, stimulated mainly the intelligence of the lettered class: on the other hand, a counter current of feeling, opposed to the sculpturesque coldness of the philosophico-classical style, in course of time appeared, deriving its force entirely from the self-conscious aspirations of German nationality. First embodied in the poems of Klopstock, the patriotic impulse was encouraged by the successes of Frederick the Great in the Seven Years' War; but finding no outlet for its emotion in the political action of a united Germany, it gradually swelled into a flood of revolutionary agitation, directed against the existing creeds and institutions of feudal society. The aesthetic manifestoes of this movement were first formulated by the *Sturm und Drang* school of poetry, one of the earliest pioneers of which was C. F. D. Schubart (1739-91), author of the *Fürstengruft.* It was avowedly a revolt against all rules and restrictions, more particularly those prescribed by the French critics; and, by a natural reaction, it sought to revive the primitive characteristics of mediaeval German romance, as was done by Gottfried Bürger, who was himself inspired by the recent revival of Ballad poetry in England. But German Romanticism was a feeling compounded of so many different elements that it is impossible to describe exhaustively the numerous imaginative forms in which it found expression. It inspired equally Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Sorrows of Werther, The Robbers*

of Schiller, and the plays of Kotzebue; and by degrees the Revolutionary inundation spread far beyond the national limits within which it was at first contained. "National literature," said Herder, "is of little importance; the age of world-literature is at hand, and every one ought to work in order to accelerate the coming of the new era. Our studies must be cosmopolitan, and must include the popular poetry of the Hebrews, the Arabs, the Franks, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and even the songs and ballads of half-savage races."

It will be seen therefore that, by two directly opposite roads, public opinion in France and Germany had been brought to the same point of revolutionary feeling. In both countries the ancient spirit of Gothic liberty, inherent in the Imperial constitution of Charlemagne, had ceased to play a leading part in the active life of the people; crushed out in France by the centralisation of all national powers in the Crown; dissipated in Germany by the lack of any central authority capable of directing the ideas of the nation towards a common end. In both countries, again, the effect of the Classical Renaissance had been to encourage among the people a revolutionary and destructive spirit. By allying with the cause of Absolutism the ancient municipal memories of Gaul, while still part of the Christianised Roman Empire, and by excluding from the intellectual development of society at once the elements of romance imported by the Teutonic conquerors, and the Huguenot ideals introduced by the Reformation, the leaders of French literary taste cut themselves off from many sources of thought which might have enlarged the scope of poetic imagination. When, at the close of Louis XIV.'s reign, the Court ceased to guide the course of the national taste, and when the inventive powers of the Classical Renaissance were exhausted, the control of public opinion passed completely into the hands of the lettered portion of the middle classes, which, being excluded from all share in the government, were ill disposed towards the beliefs and institutions of the ancient

*régime*. The witty analysis of all traditions by Voltaire penetrated the imagination alike of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and the spiritual void created by scepticism was filled only by the materialistic science of the Encyclopaedists and the social sentimentalism of Rousseau. In Germany, on the contrary, where the ancient Teutonic love of liberty had struck deep root among the people, but where the civic spirit of Imperial Rome had failed to blend with Teutonic institutions, the Renaissance allied itself with individual aspirations for complete freedom of thought. And as this intellectual liberty found itself perpetually cramped by a multitude of petty absolutisms and tyrannous sects, the men of letters in Germany, no less than those of France, encouraged the popular dislike of the feudal framework of society. Public opinion, accordingly, both in France and Germany, was, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a soil well fitted to fertilise the doctrines of cosmopolitan ideology.

How far did this body of revolutionary sentiment influence the course of national imagination in England? In the first place, it is to be remembered that the earliest movements of liberty of thought and action, in anything like a definite form, proceeded from England to the Continent. The principles of political, mental, and moral philosophy that arose out of the English Revolution of 1688, and were embodied in the works of men like Locke, Newton, and Shaftesbury, became the starting-point for the speculations of Montesquieu and the French Encyclopaedists. Similarly, the strong impulse given to literary invention in England by her constitutional movement aroused emulation among men of letters on the Continent. An imitation of the form of mock-heroic poetry adopted by Pope was attempted in Germany by Zachariä: the *Essay on Man*, *The Seasons*, *Night Thoughts*, and at a later period Macpherson's *Ossian* and Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, awoke sympathetic emotions in almost every European kingdom. Of even greater missionary influence was the growth of the new form of fiction generated by the

English idea of active constitutional liberty. The novels of Richardson furnished models for *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Sorrows of Young Werther*, and Sterne's manner gave suggestions for the tales of Jean Paul Richter. But there was this difference between the English writers and their Continental imitators, that while on the English side of the Channel the imagination of the poet and the novelist, in what is justly called the "classical" period of our literature, was forced to blend with a social atmosphere that involved a certain tradition of moral law and order, abroad the idea of liberty was translated into an abstract and isolated region of thought, from which it operated with unrestrained force on the passions of the individual mind.

In its turn this abstract Continental thought reacted on opinion in England. English society as a whole had formed for itself well-defined principles of religious and political belief, and as I showed in the last volume, the reasonings of the Deists, which exercised so powerful an undermining influence on Christian faith in France and Germany, made but little way in England against the defenders of the Established Church.[1] "Who now reads Bolingbroke?" asked Burke, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution.* "Who ever read him through?" But the centrifugal movement, inherent in liberty, worked strongly in the imagination of the people, and in alliance with the sentiment sometimes of the non-juring Jacobites, sometimes of the Methodists, and sometimes of the literary Romanticists, prepared a considerable section of public opinion for the favourable reception of ideas opposed to the fundamental character of the settled Constitutional tradition. The most powerful literary influence, communicated to England by France, came without doubt from the works of Rousseau. It was not entirely exotic, for the letters of Shenstone, which must have been written before Rousseau became famous, show a natural inclination to the same kind of self-conscious misanthropy that characterises the author of the *Confessions.*[2] But the ideas of Love,

[1] Vol. v. p. 326. [2] See vol. v. p. 371-2.

Nature-worship, and Solitude, so powerfully expressed by the Swiss philosopher, readily acclimatised themselves in the free society of England. The allusions to Rousseau in Cowper's poems and letters speak to the sympathetic emotions roused in sensitive and reflective minds by the new sentimental philosophy; but perhaps the best illustration of the attitude of representative Englishmen towards it is furnished in the conversation on the subject recorded by Boswell between Johnson and himself. The sturdy manliness of the former doubtless reflected the opinion of the majority of his countrymen:

"It seems, Sir, you have kept very good company abroad,—Rousseau and Wilkes!" Thinking it enough to defend one at a time, I said nothing as to my gay friend, but answered with a smile. "My dear Sir, you don't call Rousseau bad company. Do you really think *him* a bad man?" *Johnson.* "Sir, if you are talking jestingly of this, I don't talk with you. If you mean to be serious, I think him one of the worst of men; a rascal, who ought to be hunted out of society, as he has been. Three or four nations have expelled him: and it is a shame that he is protected in this country." *Boswell.* "I don't deny, Sir, but that his novel may, perhaps, do harm; but I cannot think his intention was bad." *Johnson.* "Sir, that will not do. We cannot prove any man's intention to be bad. You may shoot a man through the head, and say you intended to miss him; but the judge will order you to be hanged. An alleged want of intention, when evil is committed, will not be allowed in a court of justice. Rousseau, Sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations." *Boswell.* "Sir, do you think him as bad a man as Voltaire?" *Johnson.* "Why, Sir, it is difficult to settle the proportion of iniquity between them."[1]

The comment of Boswell on Johnson's judgment is not less representative of that large section of average English opinion, which, self-complacent, patriotically proud of the national tolerance, and always like the Athenians of old in search of "some new thing," was

[1] Croker's Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, pp. 175-6.

ready to expose to analysis principles established by the longest experience.

"This violence," he says, "seemed very strange to me, who had read many of Rousseau's animated writings with great pleasure, and even edification; had been much pleased with his society, and was just come from the Continent, where he was very generally admired. Nor can I yet allow that he deserves the very severe censure which Johnson pronounced upon him. His absurd preference of savage to civilised life, and other singularities, are proofs rather of a defect in his understanding, than of any depravity in his heart. And notwithstanding the unfavourable opinion which many worthy men have expressed of his *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*, I cannot help admiring it as the performance of a man full of sincere reverential submission to Divine Mystery, though beset with perplexing doubts: a state of mind to be viewed with pity rather than with anger." [1]

The influence of the German spirit on the English imagination was far less extensive than that of the French. Few Englishmen in the eighteenth century were masters of the German language; nor was there anything in the social constitution of Germany which could furnish to the English aristocracy models of taste and manners at all approaching the standard of refinement presented by the French Court. Nevertheless, the methods of theological thought encouraged in the first home of the Reformation accommodated themselves without much difficulty to the Teutonic side of the English mind, and to the turn of Nonconformist theology. Tendencies like those of Jacob Böhme were always powerful in Germany; and the genius of religious mysticism took hold, on the one side, of theological sects like the Moravians, and, on the other, of metaphysical philosophy. Moravianism gave a strong impulse to the Methodist movement in England; while Kant, starting from the negative conclusions of Hume, yet reserved for the mind a region of faith in which reason might exert its metaphysical powers. Among the cultivated classes in England, especially those living apart from the stream of active political life, the immigration of German meta-

[1] Croker's Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, p. 176.

physical thought was eagerly welcomed, and, as will be seen, did much towards moulding the poetical philosophy of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

In the more popular paths of English literature German example operated mainly by intensifying the character of the Romantic revival. Horace Walpole's Gothic experiments in fiction and architecture had opened the road to all kinds of mediæval exploration, and German literature was soon swarming with spirits and spectres, castles and convents, tales of marvel, magic, and mystery. From Germany the taste for the supernatural, returning with added force to England, found expression in the fictions of Mrs. Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis, and in numerous imitations of Bürger's famous ballad "Lenore." The stage caught the romantic infection. As I showed in my account of the English theatre in the eighteenth century, the tradition of the old poetical drama had long perished;[1] and with a few exceptions, such as the plays of Goldsmith, Colman, and Sheridan, the comedy of manners had been forced to give place to the sentimental drama. This in time, proving too insipid for audiences which had lost all sense of ideal action, and craved only for violent and extravagant sensations, had to make way for plays resembling those of Kotzebue, in which Rousseau's principle of the superiority of savage to civil life was applied in such a way as to make the stage a scene for the exhibition of actions subversive of all ideas of moral law and order.

On the whole, it may be said of the state of English taste, on the eve of the French Revolution, that, while cultivated society was far from having lost its hold on the principles of criticism established in literature by the study of the classics, the weakening of the governing classes and the spread of cosmopolitan ideas among the people had produced a body of opinion extremely favourable for the experiments of any pioneers who might attempt a new departure in the art of poetry.

[1] See vol. v. chap. xiii.

# CHAPTER III

## EXHAUSTION OF THE CLASSICAL INFLUENCE IN ENGLISH POETRY

DECLINE OF THE HISTORICAL PARTIES: FINAL STAGE OF DIDACTIC POETRY: WILLIAM MASON: ERASMUS DARWIN: POETICAL AFFECTATION: WILLIAM GIFFORD: *THE BAVIAD* AND *THE MAEVIAD*.

THE Ministry of Lord North marks the nadir both in English politics and English poetry of the Constitutional movement originated by the Revolution of 1688. Sixty years of conflict had determined the essential issue in the struggle between hereditary absolutism and parliamentary control: by the defeat of the Pretender in 1745, Jacobitism was extinguished, and the House of Hanover firmly established in the succession. A conflict of persons rather than of principles now constituted the problem of government, namely, who should exercise the prerogative of the Crown, limited as this was by practice and convention, though not precisely defined. The question was raised in an acute form by the accession of George III. On the one side a young king, of resolute character, possessed of a title to the throne no longer challenged, and free for the moment from anxiety about his Continental dominions, was bent on asserting his personal influence in the conduct of the national policy: on the other stood a powerful aristocracy, under whose leadership the practice of constitutional government had been forming itself for two generations, and who had come to regard the monarch as little more than the creature of their own will. The

Whig party, however, were divided among themselves as to the right application of their principles. The great families who had led the country in 1688 sought to secure a monopoly of power for their party represented by some president chosen from their own hereditary circle. Another body, more numerous, if less influential, upheld the sounder doctrine that the prerogative could only be properly exercised by some responsible Minister, who, though selected by the Sovereign, should enjoy the confidence of the people. George III., disliking both sections, sought every means to free the prerogative from the fetters in which the Whigs tried to confine it. Lord North, with the "King's Friends," contrived for twelve years to conduct the Government in the teeth of repeated assaults by the Opposition, and in spite of administrative blunders of his own. But the revolt of the American colonies, the disaffection of Ireland, and the Lord George Gordon riots, revealed the disorganised state of the constitutional machinery, and the nation, reduced to the lowest point of influence in the society of Europe reached since the reign of Charles II., found itself unable to maintain the supremacy of the seas against its ancient rivals, France and Spain.

This impotence in the sphere of political action has its analogy in the sphere of imaginative expression. Deeply sensible of the boon of constitutional liberty secured by the Revolution of 1688, the great statesmen of that age had recorded their principles in the Declaration of Right, the solemn though sober feeling of which is embodied in its measured diction, and imparts an air of passion and enthusiasm to the panegyrical poetry of the time, illustrated in such compositions as Addison's *Epistle to Halifax*, and (at a later date) Thomson's *Liberty*. But as the new order of things gradually established itself, the violence of party spirit found its account in conjuring up imaginary dangers to the Constitution; and the decay of genuine Whiggism is nowhere more apparent than in the extravagance of the rhetoric with which the pamphleteers of the party endeavoured to rouse the nation

against the supposed encroachments of the Crown. A deliberate intention of curdling the blood with fictitious fears underlies the melodramatic classicalism of "Junius," and Horace Walpole's correspondence is full of epigrams betraying the utter want of proportion in contemporary views of politics. Writing, for example, to Mason, about a measure rendered necessary by the conflict between Wilkes and the House of Commons, he says:

> I do not know how, an amazing bill of an amazing parent has slipped through the ten thousand fingers of venality, and gives the Constitution some chance of rousing itself—I mean Grenville's bill for trying Elections. It passed as rapidly as if it had been for a repeal of Magna Charta, brought in by Mr. Cofferer Dyson.[1]

In a like spirit the sensible and learned Sir William Jones compares in an ode the successful efforts of the Opposition in 1782 to the act of the tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton:

> Not less glorious was the deed,
> Wentworth![2] fixed in virtue's cause;
> Not less brilliant be thy meed,
> Lennox![3] friend to equal laws.
> High in Freedom's temple raised,
> See Fitz-maurice[4] beaming stand;
> For collected virtues praised,
> Wisdom's voice and valour's hand!
> Ne'er shall Fate their eyelids close:
> They, in blooming regions blest,
> With Harmodius shall repose,
> With Aristogeiton rest.
> No blest chiefs! a hero's crown
> Let the Athenian patriots claim;
> You less fiercely won renown,
> You assumed a milder name:
> They through blood for glory strove,
> You more blissful tidings bring;
> They to death a tyrant drove;
> You to fame restored a king.

[1] *Correspondence of Horace Walpole and the Rev. J. Mason* (*Mitford*), vol. i. p. 137.

[2] Marquis of Rockingham, Lord North's successor.

[3] Duke of Richmond, one of the chiefs of the Opposition to Lord North.

[4] Lord Shelburne.

Rise, Britannia! dauntless rise!
Cheered with triple harmony,
Monarch good and nobles wise,
People valiant, firm and free![1]

In this state of things the civic spirit of the Classical Renaissance—which, as I showed in the last volume, animates so much of the English Poetry in the first half of the eighteenth century—lost its freshening impulse, and, as had happened in other countries of Europe, the literary revival began to degenerate into a mechanical reproduction of Greek and Roman forms. Gray, the last English poet of eminence who was stirred by the political genius of the Renaissance, and who contrived to blend with it the spirit of literary romance, died in 1771, leaving no worthy successor; nor does the Ministry of Lord North furnish the name of a single poet, epic, dramatic, satiric or lyric, deserving to be compared with the earlier writers of the same kind since the Renaissance began to operate as a living force in English society. The nearest approach to original character is seen in the work of Gray's friend and first biographer, whose poems, as they reflect accurately the prevailing temper of the times, call from the historian for a more extended notice than they merit in themselves.

William Mason was born in 1724. His father, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Kingston-upon-Hull, educated him at home till his matriculation at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1743, from which he took his B.A. degree in 1745 and his M.A. in 1749. In the latter year, through the influence of Gray, whose acquaintance he had made in 1747, he was elected Fellow of Pembroke, and composed an Ode in honour of the installation of the Duke of Newcastle as Chancellor of the University. He had already earned the name of a poet by his pastoral Monody, *Musaeus*, written in 1744—while he was still an undergraduate—on the death of Pope; and his Whiggism was displayed in *Isis* (1748), a satire in which he attacked the Jacobite tendencies of the University of Oxford,

[1] Sir William Jones' *Ode in imitation of Callistratus.*

comparing them with the orthodox sentiments of Locke, Hough, and Addison :

> Alas ! how changed ! Where now that Attic boast ?
> See ! Gothic licence rage o'er all my coast.
> See ! Hydra faction spread its impious reign,
> Poison each breast, and madden every brain.
> Hence frontless crowds that, not content to fright
> The blushing Cynthia from her throne of night,
> Blast the fair face of day, and madly bold
> To freedom's foes infernal orgies hold ;
> To freedom's foes, ah ! see the goblet crowned !
> Hear plausive shouts to freedom's foes resound !

To this attack an answer was returned in 1749 by Thomas Warton in a spirited composition called *The Triumph of Isis.* In 1752 Mason attempted the drama in *Elfrida*, a poem with a Saxon subject, but "written" (to use his own words) "on the model of the ancient Greek," which, against the author's will, was put on the stage at Covent Garden by Colman in 1772. Neither this play nor *Caractacus*, composed on the same plan in 1759, and acted at Covent Garden in 1776, met with any success in the theatre, though *Elfrida* was so much appreciated by the reading public that Mason, in 1756, published four Odes resembling in structure the choruses of his drama. These were not favourably received, and, with Gray's *Progress of Poesy*, were parodied by Colman and Lloyd in the *Odes to Obscurity and Oblivion.* Having taken Orders in 1754, Mason was made Chaplain to the King, and was presented by Lord Holdernesse to the living of Aston in Yorkshire. Here, in 1765, he married Maria, daughter of William Sherman of Kingston upon Hull, who, within two years' time, died of consumption at Bristol, and was lamented by her husband in the remarkably beautiful lines placed on her monument in Bristol Cathedral :

> Take, holy earth, all that my soul holds dear ;
> Take that best gift which Heaven so lately gave :
> To Bristol's fount I bore with trembling care
> Her faded form : she bowed to taste the wave

And died. Does youth, does beauty, read this line?
Does sympathetic fear their breasts alarm?
Speak, dead Maria! breathe a strain divine:
Ev'n from the grave thou shalt have power to charm.
Bid them be chaste and innocent like thee;
Bid them in duty's sphere as meekly move;
And, if so fair, from vanity as free;
As firm in friendship, and as fond in love.
Tell them, though 'tis an awful thing to die,
('Twas ev'n to thee) yet, the dread path once trod,
Heaven lifts its everlasting portals high,
And bids "the pure in heart behold their God."[1]

To his wife's last hours he alludes in the same spirit in his *English Garden*, a didactic poem in four books, the first of which was published in 1772, and the last in 1782. His time was for the most part quietly spent in York, where he held a canonry of the Cathedral, or in his vicarage at Aston, the grounds of which he amused himself with improving on the principles of landscape-gardening recommended by Horace Walpole. Here too he completed a translation in English verse of Du Fresnoy's *Art of Painting*, which was published in 1783. He retained his interest in politics, and gave anonymous expression to his Whiggism in *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, Knight*, a satire published in 1773, which fell in seasonably with the heightened party feeling of the time, and was followed at intervals by several ironic compositions of the same class up to 1782. Towards the close of this period he resumed his old lyric style in Odes to *The Naval Officers of Great Britain*, and *The Honourable William Pitt*, to whose political cause he so firmly adhered that a breach was caused in the long friendship between himself and Horace Walpole. Mason never ceased to be a Whig, as is shown by his *Secular Ode on November the Fifth 1788*; but he seems to have perceived earlier than Walpole the democratic tendencies in the section of the party led by Fox. The two friends were eventually reconciled by the tragic condition of things produced during the course of the French Revolution. Mason died on the 7th of April 1797, and a monument was

[1] The three last lines are Gray's.

erected to his memory in Westminster Abbey, adjoining that of Gray, whose *Memoirs* he had published in 1774.

His character and poetry illustrate the point of Johnson's epigram that Whiggism is mere negation. Between Johnson and Mason there was indeed an instinctive antipathy. The correspondence of Walpole with the latter shows that the only qualities which either of them could discover in Johnson were bad manners, pompousness, and verbosity; while Johnson's opinion of Mason is recorded by Boswell in an amusing passage:

> Somebody mentioned the Reverend Mr. Mason's prosecution of Mr. Murray, the bookseller, for having inserted in a collection of "Gray's Poems" only fifty lines, of which Mr. Mason had still the exclusive property, under the statute of Queen Anne; and that Mr. Mason had persevered, notwithstanding his being requested to name his own terms of compensation. Johnson signified his displeasure at Mr. Mason's conduct very strongly; but added, by way of showing that he was not surprised at it, "Mason's a Whig." *Mrs. Knowles* (not hearing distinctly). "What! a prig, Sir?" *Johnson.* "Worse, Madam; a Whig! But he is both!"[1]

A characteristic supplement to this is furnished by Gray's description of his friend in his Cambridge days, as

> A good and well-meaning creature, but in simplicity a child; he reads little or nothing, writes abundance, and that with a design to make a fortune by it; a little vain but in so harmless and comical a way that it does not offend: a little ambitious, but withal so ignorant of the world and its ways, that this does not hurt him in one's opinion; so sincere and undisguised that no mind with a spark of generosity would ever think of hurting him, he lies so open to injury; but so indolent that, if he cannot overcome this habit, all his good qualities will signify nothing at all.[2]

A mixture of sincerity, literary ambition, indolence, and petty legality, manifests itself in most of Mason's poetical compositions. He seems to be more of a critic than a poet. His dramas (much admired at the time) show regularity of conception and purity of taste, but have little movement, and no root in the genius of the

[1] *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (Croker's Edition), 1860, p. 595.
[2] Gray to Wharton, 9th March 1748-9.

English theatre: his lyrics are entirely wanting in the swift enthusiasm of Collins' or the restrained energy of Gray's verse. He is more at home as a follower of Thomson and Akenside, and Warton's praise of his *English Garden*, as a composition in which "didactic poetry is brought to perfection by the happy combination of judicious precepts with the most elegant ornaments of language and imagery," is not undeserved.

The growing refinement and material prosperity of the age, indicated by the widespread taste among the nobility for the arts of architecture, painting, and landscape gardening, encouraged the production of didactic poetry, in which Mason's accomplishments qualified him to excel. He was enough of a painter to translate with understanding the precepts of Du Fresnoy, and enough of a musician to devise improvements in the harpsichord. In his *English Garden* he develops the tendency, which I noticed in Dyer's *Ruins of Rome*, to combine the principles of poetry and painting;[1] and his lines invoking the genius of the latter art may be cited as illustrating the spirit of the entire composition:

> Nor if here
> The painter comes, shall his enchanting art
> Go back without a boon: for Fancy here
> With Nature's living colours forms a scene
> Which Ruisdale best might rival; crystal lakes
> O'er which the giant oak, himself a grove,
> Flings his romantic branches, and beholds
> His reverend image in the expanse below.
> If distant hills be wanting, yet our eye
> Forgets the want, and with delighted gaze
> Rests on the lovely foreground; then applauds
> The art which, varying forms and blending hues,
> Gives that harmonious force of shade and light
> Which makes the landscape perfect. Art like this
> Is only art, all else abortive toil.
> Come then, thou sister Muse, from whom the mind
> Wins for her airy visions colour, form,
> And fixt locality, sweet Painting, come,
> To teach the docile pupil of my song
> How much his practice on thy aid depends.

[1] Vol. v. p. 325.

Verses like these reveal what the spirit of the Classical Renaissance had done for the education and correction of English taste. How naturally the same spirit allied itself with the temper of aristocratic Whiggism may be seen in the *Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, Knight.* Chambers was an architect of repute, trained in the Palladian principles which, since the days of Sir Christopher Wren, had found increasing favour with the English aristocracy. But he was also anxious to satisfy the craving for novelty experienced by the *dilettanti* of the time, ever a prey to the ennui of which Horace Walpole speaks in a passage I have already cited.[1] To satisfy these æsthetic "Quid-nuncs" Chambers, in *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, had called attention to the architectural practice of the Chinese; and Walpole himself who, in spite of his adherence to the *natural* principles of gardening introduced by Pope, had rebelled against the despotism of classic rule, was inclined to approve an experiment in this direction. It happened, however, that Chambers was in favour at Court, and with the Court all the Whigs were of course at deadly war. Mason, seeing an opportunity for striking a blow at once in behalf of "correct" taste and against the "King's Friends," rather happily addressed an ironic epistle to the "Knight of the Polar Star," applying the Chinese principles of architecture to an imaginary garden:

> There was a time "in Esher's peaceful grove,
> When Kent and Nature vied for Pelham's love,"
> That Pope beheld them with auspicious smile,
> And owned that beauty blessed their mutual toil.
> Mistaken bard! could such a pair design
> Scenes fit to live in thy immortal line?
> Hadst thou been born in this enlightened day,
> Felt, as we feel, taste's oriental ray,
> Thy satire sure had giv'n them both a stab,
> Called Kent a driveller and the nymph a drab.
> For what is Nature? ring her changes round,
> Her three flat notes are water, plants, and ground;
> Prolong the peal, yet spite of all your clatter,
> The tedious chime is still ground, plants, and water.

[1] Vol. v. p. 361.

So when some John his dull invention racks,
To rival Boodle's dinners or Almack's,
Three uncouth legs of mutton shock our eyes,
Three roasted geese, three buttered apple-pies.

Among the varieties exhibited in a Chinese garden Chambers had mentioned that "their scenes of terror are composed of gloomy woods, etc.; gibbets, crosses, wheels, and the whole apparatus of torture are seen from the roads." The author of the *Heroic Epistle* suggests that this principle might be applied in the royal gardens at Richmond in the following fashion:

Now to our lawns of dalliance and delight
Join we the groves of horror and affright.
This to achieve no foreign aids we try;
Thy gibbets, Bagshot! shall our wants supply;
Hounslow, whose heath sublimer terror fills,
Shall with her gallows lend her powder mills:
Here too, O king of vengeance, in thy fane
Tremendous Wilkes shall rattle his gold chain;
And round that fane, on many a Tyburn tree,
Hang fragments dire of Newgate-history;
On this shall Holland's dying speech be read;
Here Bute's Confession and his wooden head;
While all the minor plunderers of the age,
(Too numerous far for this contracted page),
The Rigbys, Calcrafts, Dysons, Bradshaws, there
In straw-stuft effigy shall kick the air.

The light style befitted the subject. Unfortunately, Mason was so deluded by the party spirit of the Whigs, that he deemed it advisable to point the moral of his satire by *An Heroic Postscript*, in which he shows that he seriously thinks of himself as a Juvenal or a Pope:

But if that country claim a graver strain,
If real danger threat fair freedom's reign,
If hireling peers, in prostitution bold,
Sell her as cheaply as themselves they sold;
Or they who, honoured by the people's choice,
Against that people lift their rebel voice,
And, basely crouching for their paltry pay,
Vote the best birthright of her sons away,
Permit a nation's inborn wealth to fly
In mean unkingly prodigality;
Nor, ere they give, ask how the same were spent,

So quickly squandered, though so lately lent,—
If this they dare, the thunder of his song,
Rolling in deep-toned energy along,
Shall strike, with truth's dread bolt, each miscreant's name,
Who, dead to duty, senseless e'en to shame,
Betrayed his country. Yes, ye faithless crew,
His Muse's vengeance shall your crimes pursue,
Stretch you on satire's rack, and bid you lie
Fit garbage for the hell-hound Infamy.

Mason's powers of versification are sufficiently illustrated in the specimens I have given. The praise to which he is entitled is correctness, but correctness of the negative order indicated by Churchill, who frequently sneers at him:

In the small compass of my careless page
Critics may find employment for an age:
Without my blunders they were all undone;
I twenty feed where Mason can feed one.[1]

His satire is a faint echo of Pope's, having some of the point, but little of the polished terseness of that poet: his lyrics recall what Suckling said of Carew's, that they were "never brought forth but with labour and pains": his didactic style has the purity of Akenside, and is applied to a fitting subject; but like Akenside's it is also often pedantic, and leaves on the mind an impression of the poet's want of humour, as when, in his *English Garden*, he praises the taste of a landed proprietor who *builds* monastic *ruins* for the purpose of dignifying ice-houses and dairies:

Now nearer home he calls returning Art
To hide the structure rude, where Winter pounds
In conic pit his congelations hoar,
That Summer may his tepid beverage cool
With the chill luxury; his dairy too
There stands of form unsightly: both to veil,
He builds of old disjointed moss-grown stone
A time-struck abbey. An impending grove
Screens it behind with reverential shade:
While bright in front the stream reflecting spreads,
Which wends a mimic river o'er his lawn.
The fane conventual there is dimly seen,
The mitred window, and the cloister pale,
With many a mouldering column; ivy soon

[1] *Gotham.* 191-4.

Round the rude chinks her net of foliage spreads;
Its verdant meshes seem to prop the wall.

If Mason's work shows, as I have said, the tendency in the art of poetry to recruit the sinking springs of invention from the sister art of painting, the exhaustion of the inspiring sources of the Classical Renaissance is no less visible in the design of combining poetry with science, which is the main characteristic of the once famous *Botanic Garden* of Erasmus Darwin. This poet, born the 12th of December 1731, at Elston in Nottinghamshire, was the son of a gentleman of means, and was educated at Chesterfield School and St. John's College, Cambridge, where he took his B.A. degree in 1754. He studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, taking the degree of M.B. in 1755 at Cambridge. Beginning practice as a physician at Lichfield in 1756, he soon acquired reputation from the ingenuity and novelty of his methods. After his arrival Lichfield became the headquarters of a small literary coterie, which included among its leading members Richard Lovell Edgeworth, father of the well-known novelist; the eccentric Thomas Day, author of *Sandford and Merton*; Thomas Seward, one of the canons of the Cathedral, first critical editor of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, father of Anna Seward; and which occasionally receive sarcastic notices in the letters of Dr. Johnson. Anna Seward, Darwin's friend and biographer, treats it with more respect, and records the sayings and doings of the circle in a style of amusing magniloquence. In it Darwin found his first wife Mary Howard, who died in 1770, leaving him with several children, three of them being sons, the second of whom, Robert, became the father of Charles Darwin, the famous naturalist. In 1778 Erasmus bought a little valley just outside Lichfield, where he amused himself with cultivating a great variety of aquatic plants. To this spot, when fully developed, he introduced his friend Miss Seward, who returned the compliment by celebrating the paradise in the lines which—somewhat modified—form the opening of *The Botanic Garden.*

When Miss Seward gave this little poem to Dr. Darwin he seemed pleased with it and said: "I shall send it to the periodical publications; but it ought to form the exordium of a great work. The Linnean system is unexplored poetic ground, and an happy subject for the Muse. It affords fine scope for poetic landscape; it suggests metamorphoses of the Ovidian kind, though reversed. Ovid made men and women into flowers, plants, and trees. You should make flowers, plants, and trees into men and women. I," continued he, "will write the notes which must be scientific, and you shall write the verse." Miss S. observed that, besides her want of botanic knowledge, the plan was not strictly proper for a female pen; that she felt how eminently it was adapted to the efflorescence of his own fancy.[1]

This was in 1779. Darwin, taking his friend's advice, set to work upon his poem, which occupied him for ten years; the second part, *The Loves of the Plants*, being published the first, in 1789, and the whole work completed in 1791. In 1781 he married, as his second wife, Mrs. Pole, widow of Colonel Chandos Pole of Radbourne Hall, and at her wish removed his practice to Derby, where he remained till his death, on the 18th of April 1802. Besides *The Botanic Garden* his compositions in verse are mainly of the old-fashioned complimentary kind, amorous or elegiac. In politics he was a strenuous Whig; and *The Botanic Garden* contains many allusions, both in the text and the notes, embodying his opinions on the Slave Trade, the American War, and the early stages of the French Revolution.

Darwin, as the extract from Miss Seward's *Memoir* shows, evidently believed himself in *The Botanic Garden* to be treading in the poetic footsteps of classical predecessors; and it may be admitted that, in certain features, there is an essential resemblance between his conception of Nature and that of the Greeks. Like the latter he thought of an unseen personality, running through all organisms in the physical world, and breaking down the apparent walls of partition between animals, vegetables, and minerals. As the Greeks imagined that all the visible phenomena of Nature were caused by the agency of particular deities, so Darwin personified the secondary causes of things. But

[1] Miss Seward, *Memoir of the Life of Darwin*.

the action of imagination in the Greek poet and the English man of science was radically different. In the former it was creative. Starting from the conception of divine personality, the Greeks explained to themselves the movements of sun, moon, and stars, of the seas and the rivers, of trees and plants, through the medium of human action and passion: hence arose their rich mythology, which provided, even in the philosophical stages of civilisation, materials for epic and dramatic poetry. Darwin, on the contrary, working on the scientific lines of the Renaissance, employed his imagination, analytically, for the discovery of principles adequate to explain the mechanical forces of Nature; and he was always ready to discard the hypotheses of fancy when these came into conflict with observed facts. The Nymphs and Goddesses, the Nereids, Naiads, and Dryads, whose histories he borrowed from Greek mythology, and who were to their Greek creators impassioned living beings, provided the author of *The Botanic Garden* with merely decorative images and names, useful for presenting to the reader, in a fanciful form, the science of Linnaeus.

Darwin's avowed intention of taking Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as his model necessarily led him to a strongly marked manner of poetical expression. In Ovid all is action: in Darwin all is description: if action is anywhere introduced into *The Botanic Garden*, it is almost invariably by means of a simile. Where an exception is found, as in the following passage, it will be seen that the narrative strays into the grotesque. The poet is describing a plant on which he writes the following scientific note:

> *Tremella*, l. 27. Clandestine Marriage.—I have frequently observed fungusses of this genus on old rails and on the ground to become a transparent jelly, after they had been frozen in autumnal mornings; which is a curious property, and distinguishes them from some other vegetable mucilage; for I have observed that the paste made by boiling wheat-flour in water, ceases to be adhesive after having been frozen.

This observation is translated into mythological narrative thus;

On Dove's green brink the fair Tremella stood,
And viewed her playful image in the flood;
To each rude rock, lone dell, and echoing grove,
Sang the sweet sorrows of her secret love.
"Oh, stay!—return!"—along the sounding shore
Cried the sad Naiads,—she returned no more!
Now, girt with clouds, the sullen evening frowned,
And withering Eurus swept along the ground;
The misty moon withdrew her horned light,
And sunk with Hesper in the skirt of night;
No dim electric streams (the northern dawn)
With meek effulgence quivered o'er the lawn;
No star benignant shot one transient ray,
To guide or light the wanderer on her way;
Round the dark crags the murmuring whirlwinds blow,
Woods groan above, and waters roar below;
As o'er the steep with pausing step she moves,
The pitying Dryads shriek amid the groves.
She flies—she stops—she pants—she looks behind,
And hears a demon howl in every wind.
As the bleak blast unfurls her fluttering vest,
Cold beats the snow upon her shuddering breast;
Through her numbed limbs the chill sensations dart,
And the keen ice-bolt trembles at her heart.
"I sink, I fall! oh, help me, help!" she cries,
Her stiffening tongue the unfinished sound denies;
Tear after tear adown her cheek succeeds,
And pearls of ice bestrew the glittering meads;
Congealing snows her lingering feet surround,
Arrest her flight and root her to the ground;
With suppliant arms she pours the silent prayer;
Her suppliant arms hang crystal in the air;
Pellucid films her shivering neck o'erspread,
Seal her mute lips, and silver o'er her head;
Veil her pale bosom, glaze her lifted hands,
And shrined in ice the beauteous statue stands.
Dove's azure nymphs on each revolving year
For fair Tremella shed the tender tear;
With rush-wove crowns in sad procession move,
And sound the sorrowing shell to hapless love.[1]

It is interesting to compare this classical allegory with the romantic allegory of Phineas Fletcher in *The Purple Island*, and to observe in each case how the genius of action is smothered by the profuseness of scientific description.[2]

[1] *Botanic Garden*, Canto i. 427-66.
[2] Vol. iii. p. 138.

As to the other distinctive feature in the narrative style of *The Botanic Garden*, namely, the multitude of its similes, introduced without any real relevance to the subject-matter, Darwin pursued this practice deliberately. In an Interlude professing to record a dialogue between the poet and his bookseller, the latter asks:

*B.* Then a simile should not very accurately resemble the subject?

*P.* No; it would then become a philosophical analogy; it would be ratiocination instead of poetry: it need only so far resemble the subject as poetry itself ought to resemble nature. It should have so much sublimity, beauty, or novelty, as to interest the reader, and should be expressed in picturesque language so as to bring the scenery before his eye; and should lastly bear so much verisimilitude as not to awaken him by the violence of improbability or incongruity.[1]

It need hardly be said that Homer's similes (on which Darwin professed to model himself) are *always* introduced with a view of relieving the action of the narrative, and are really like the objects to which they are compared. But the similes in *The Botanic Garden* are so grotesquely irrelevant, that the parody of them in *The Loves of the Triangles* can scarcely be regarded as a caricature.

Exaggerated imitation of classical forms shows itself in the diction of *The Botanic Garden* in two ways. First in the excessive use of the figure of Personification. Since the days of Addison the tendency in prose-writing had been to encroach more and more, by means of literary conventions, on the colloquial usage which that great essayist had made the groundwork of his style. Johnson and his contemporaries introduced into English as much as they could of Latin condensation, and their readers admired them for their ingenuity.

"Dr. Johnson, Mr. Burke, and Dr. Parr," says Miss Seward, "have this habit in their prose: 'Criticism pronounces,' instead of 'Critics pronounce.' 'Malignance will not allow,' instead of 'Malignant people will not allow.' 'Good-nature refuses to listen,' instead of 'a good-natured man refuses to listen,' and so

[1] *Botanic Garden*, Interlude ii.

on. This manner of writing, whether in verse or prose, sweeps from the polished marble of poetry and eloquence a number of the sticks and straws of our language: its articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. Addison's serious essays are so littered with them and with idioms, as to render it strange that they should still be considered as patterns of didactic oratory. No man of genius, however, adopts their feeble and diffusive style, now that the strength, the grace, and harmony of prose-writing, on the dignified examples of our *later* essayists, senators, and pleaders, give us better examples."[1]

Judiciously applied, the classical standard of polish and refinement was beneficial, but where writers lacked humour, the result was an absurd air of pomposity, and a Malvolio-like persuasion that the language had at last become fixed by the measure of their pedantic practice. The true motive of *The Botanic Garden* is to be found in the notes, which display the closest observation of Nature and the most ingenious hypotheses about the causes of things. When Darwin had definitely formed his scientific ideas, he began his work of translating them into poetic diction. He showed considerable mechanical skill in applying the forms of pastoral mythology, introduced by the English poets at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but he pursued the device *ad nauseam*. Towns, plants, and even metals are all honoured as minor deities, —"Unconquered Steam,"[2] "Adamantine Steel,"[3]—or are made acquainted with their own properties, as:

> Hence glow, refulgent Tin! thy crystal grains,
> And tawny Copper shoots her azure veins.[4]

The Gnomes are adjured by their superior goddess to guard the tender seed in her subterranean bosom against the ravages of the worm,

> And give my vegetable babes to day.[5]

In order to dignify the latter subject a simile of ten lines is introduced, describing the release of St. Peter from prison.[6]

[1] Miss Seward's *Life of Darwin*.
[2] *Botanic Garden*, Canto i. 289.
[3] *Ibid.* Canto i. 201.
[4] *Ibid.* Canto i. 401-2.
[5] *Ibid.* Canto i. 564.
[6] *Ibid.* Canto i. 565-74.

In the same way, the action of a common pump, having been described, is made poetical by a simile of an infant sucking at the breast; nor are the Naiads who preside over the fire-engine left unsung:

> Nymphs! you first taught the gelid wave to rise,
> Hurled in resplendent arches to the skies;
> In iron cells condensed the airy spring,
> And imped the torrent with unfailing wing.
> On the fierce flames the shower impetuous falls,
> And sudden darkness shrouds the shattered walls;
> Steam, smoke, and dust in blended volumes roll,
> And Night and Silence repossess the Pole.[1]

Next to its exaggerated personification, the mannerism of *The Botanic Garden* is most apparent in the stereotyped use of epithets, the emptiness of which may be noted in any of the passages I have cited. It is worth while, indeed, to observe more particularly the effect of this mechanical trick on the entire character of Darwin's versification. Within the limits he imposed upon himself, his varied management of the couplet displays much skill, but one movement is so frequently repeated as constantly to arrest the reader's attention; namely, the employment of a trochee in the first two syllables of the line, followed by two monosyllabic words, adjective and substantive, causing a caesura after the fourth syllable, as in the following passage:

> Pervade, pellucid Forms! their cold retreat,
> Ray from bright urns | your viewless floods of heat;
> From earth's deep wastes electric torrents pour,
> Or shed from heaven the scintillating shower;
> Pierce the dull root, | relax its fibre-trains,
> Thaw the thick blood, | which lingers in its veins;
> Melt with warm breath | the fragrant gums, that bind
> The expanding foliage in its scaly rind;
> And as in air the laughing leaflets play,
> And turn their shining bosoms to the ray,
> Nymphs! with sweet smile | each opening flower invite,
> And on its damask eyelids pour the light.[2]

I have dwelt with some fulness on the work of a poet who, as such, does not merit high admiration, because its

[1] *Botanic Garden*, Canto iii. 385-92. [2] *Ibid.* Canto i. 461-72.

character illustrates in the most striking manner what has been already said, that, after the Revolution of 1688, the classical genius of the Renaissance allied itself naturally in poetry with the civic spirit of the Whig movement; and that, as this lost its motive of action, the classical style—just as had been the case in Italy, Spain, and France—sank correspondingly into the imitation of mere external literary forms.[1] Darwin, in his mechanical fashion, appropriated and extended Pope's usage of the couplet in the *Pastorals* and *Windsor Forest*, while that poet still lingered in "Fancy's maze"; there is nothing in common between the numbers of *The Botanic Garden* and the energetic versification of the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* or the *Moral Essays*, when the author of *The Rape of the Lock* "stooped to Truth and moralised his song." The translation of the *Iliad*, a great performance in itself, is in some parts necessarily mechanical, and stereotypes certain metrical features easy of imitation, which, being exaggerated by Pope's followers, came, through their perversion, to be regarded by later generations as the chief marks of "*the* Pope style." I trust that the course of this history has made it sufficiently clear that they have nothing to do with the essential character of Pope's work, and that for the "poetical diction" assailed by Wordsworth he is not really more responsible than Raphael is responsible for the insipid mannerisms of Baroccio.[2]

Mason and Darwin at least exhibit a manliness of style, the one in the severity of his self-discipline, the other in the robustness of his invention. But the exhaustion of the civic spirit of the Renaissance betrays itself with more fatal significance in the tendencies of the verse which, about this period, began to find favour with polite society. The *cacoethes scribendi* had been constantly extending itself. A taste for literature, schooled and regulated by the essays of Addison, had expanded with the growth of the nation, and had found, through the enterprise of booksellers and the freedom of the press, channels of expression for every kind of spiritual eccentricity. In the place of the Clubs

[1] See vol. v. pp. 3-11. [2] See vol. v. chap. xiv.

and Coffee-houses, the main haunts of the readers of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, conversation was now carried on chiefly in literary coteries, often under the presidency of female genius, the various tastes of which were reflected in weekly or even daily organs of the public press. The great object of these fashionable assemblies being to kill the time, each of them furnished a striking illustration of the truth of Addison's saying that "the mind that lies fallow but for a single day sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture." A kind of Album poetry came into fashion, which at first did not aim at anything more ambitious than the acrostics, anagrams, rebuses, and other varieties of small wit which had been the object of Addison's pleasantry. By degrees the force of mutual admiration and the love of gossip encouraged experiments of a more mischievous character. A paper called *The World* was started, the editors of which were cunning enough to make money out of the vanity and curiosity of rich idlers, by admitting their poetical compositions and publishing the details of private life. Into this, or a similar sink called *The Oracle*, the scribblers of the day, with various *noms de plume*, poured themselves forth, and were celebrated by the Journals as poets of unrivalled genius. Dukes and duchesses, rich tradesmen, officers of the army, "blue-stocking" authoresses, swelled the circle of the initiated, which was largely recruited from Whig sources and repeated the catchwords of that party. The quality most affected by the Album poets was the refined sensibility which Rousseau had brought into fashion. They called for public sympathy on "the death of a bug, the flight of an earwig, the miscarriage of a cock-chaffer, or some other event of equal importance."[1] Among the bards of this class a distinguished place was occupied by Edward Jerningham ("Snivelling Jerningham," as Gifford calls him; 1727-1812), author of a poem called *Il Latte*, exhorting ladies to nurse their own children, to whose sentiments reference is made in the following characteristic lines from *The Botanic Garden*:

[1] Note to *The Baviad*, 351.

Connubial Fair! whom no fond transport warms
To lull your infant in maternal arms;
Who, blessed in vain with tumid bosoms, hear
His tender wailings with unfeeling ear;
The soothing kiss and milky rill deny,
To the sweet pouting lip and glistening eye!
Ah! what avails the cradle's damask roof,
The eider bolster, and embroidered woof!—
Oft hears the gilded couch unpitied plains,
And many a tear the tasselled cushion stains!
No voice so sweet attunes his cares to rest,
So soft no pillow as his mother's breast.
Thus charmed to sweet repose, when twilight hours
Shed their soft influence on celestial bowers,
The Cherub, Innocence, with smile divine,
Shuts his white wings, and sleeps on Beauty's shrine.[1]

Another poet of the same class with Jerningham contributed to *The Oracle* an Elegy

On a tame mouse which belonged to a lady who saved its life, constantly fed it, and even wept at its approaching death. The mouse's eyes actually dropped out of its head the day before it died.

This feeling mouse, whose heart was warmed
By Pity's purest ray,
Because her mistress dropt a tear,
Wept both her eyes away.

By sympathy deprived of light,
She one day's darkness tried;
The grateful tear no more could flow,
So liked it not, and died.

May we, when others weep for us,
The debt with int'rest pay;
And when the generous fonts are dry
Resort to native clay.[2]

The way having been fully prepared by such minor warblers, the Genius of the coterie made his appearance in the person of Robert Merry (1755-1798), a man of fortune and fashion, who, having for some time figured as the centre of a literary *salon* at Florence, consisting of Mrs.

[1] *Economy of Vegetation*, Canto iii. 361-76. [2] Note to *The Baviad*, 351.

Piozzi and some of her friends, gave himself out as a modern Petrarch. A sonnet "To Love," written by this person under the name of Della Crusca, and published in *The World*, was answered in fitting terms by Hannah Cowley, authoress of *The Belle's Stratagem* (1743-1809), who had had some success as a playwright, and who now appeared in *The World* as Della Crusca's lover, calling herself "Anna Matilda." Her example was followed by Mary Robinson (1758-1800), notorious as "Perdita," and was the signal for the outbreak, in the columns of the same journal, of a species of poetical Mormonism among the Album poets. To use the words of the author of *The Baviad*:

> The fever turned to a frenzy: Laura Maria, Carlos, Orlando, Adelaide, and a thousand nameless names, caught the infection; and from one end of the kingdom to the other all was nonsense and Della Crusca.

Della Crusca's style showed a mixture of the extravagant conceits of the Provençal poets with the bombastic classicism of Darwin. Describing his own person, he says, by way of a hint that he is no longer young, that Love recently

> Tore his name from his bright page,
> And gave it to approaching age.[1]

Having solicited an interview with Anna Matilda, and found her as orthodoxically "cruel" as the mistresses of the Troubadours, he utters his despair thus:

> Yet I will prove that I deserve my fate,
> Was born for anguish, and was formed for hate,
> With such transcendent woe will breathe my sigh,
> That envying fiends shall think it ecstasy.[2]

And again,

> Canst thou, Matilda, urge my fate,
> And bid me mourn thee? yes, and mourn too late!
> O rash, severe decree! my maddening brain
> Cannot the ponderous agony sustain;
> But forth I rush, from vale to mountain run,
> And with my mind's thick gloom obscure the sun.[3]

Like many Whig poets of the time, Della Crusca was

[1] *The Baviad*, 64 (note). [2] *Ibid.* 97 (note). [3] *Ibid.* 97 (note).

enchanted with the opening of the French Revolution, which he celebrated in a poem called *The Wreath of Liberty*. In this he sought to transcend the manner of Darwin (who rarely writes absolute nonsense)—in such couplets as the following:

> Summer-tints begemmed the scene,
> And silky ocean slept in glossy green.
>
> While air's nocturnal ghost, in paly shroud,
> Glances with grisly glare from cloud to cloud,
> And gauzy zephyrs, fluttering o'er the plain,
> On twilight's bosom drop their filmy rain.
>
> The explosion came,
> And burst the o'ercharged culverin of shame.[1]

For some time the poetasters and their admirers were allowed to exhibit their antics without interruption. But these becoming at last outrageous, the sound part of public opinion revolted, and a champion appeared on the side of good sense. William Gifford was born at Ashburton in Devonshire, in 1757, of poor parents, who neglected his education. Left an orphan in 1770, after being put by his guardian to serve as ship-boy at Brixham till he was fourteen, he was at last sent to school, where his natural talents became at once apparent; but when he mentioned to his guardian his desire to improve himself, the latter removed him and apprenticed him to a shoemaker. In spite of this tyranny, the boy struggled to acquire knowledge, and taught himself the elements of mathematics. All the literature that he possessed at this time was the Bible and the *Imitatio Christi*, left him by his mother; but he now made the acquaintance of a benevolent country surgeon, William Cookesley, who, on hearing his story, showed an interest on his behalf, and provided means to give him education sufficient for a University training. He was eventually admitted as Bible Reader in Exeter College, Oxford, in February 1779, and by the help of Cookesley and other benefactors was enabled to complete his University course, passing to his B.A. degree in 1782. At Oxford, besides the usual

[1] *The Baviad*, 39 (note).

classical studies, he made himself master of French and Spanish, and finished his translation of Juvenal, which he had begun at the age of eighteen.

Schooling of this kind, founded on reality and acquired by suffering, qualified Gifford for penetrating the tricks of affectation and false taste. In 1791, when the Cruscan mania was at its height, his indignation found vent:

"I waited," said he in his Preface to *The Baviad*, "with a patience which I can better account for than excuse, for some one (other than myself) to step forth to convict the growing depravity of the public taste, and check the inundation of absurdity now bursting upon us from a thousand springs. As no one appeared, and as the evil grew every day more alarming (for bed-ridden old women, and girls at their samplers, began to rave), I determined, without much confidence of success, to try what could be effected by my feeble powers; and accordingly wrote the following Poem."

*The Baviad* is an imitation of the first satire of Persius, and with *The Maeviad* is the last example of that class of satire, illustrated by the genius of Oldham, Pope, and Johnson, in which the authors seek to adapt the civic spirit of Roman poetry to the circumstances of English life. Gifford's choice of instrument was remarkably judicious, for the Satires of Horace and Persius, no less than the Epistles of Pliny, show that, from Augustus to Trajan, the spirit of affectation was rampant in Latin literature. The satirist had only to look into Persius to find, in the passion for notoriety experienced by the pretenders to inspiration under the Roman Cæsars, the prototypes of the Merrys, Jerninghams, and their admirers in his own day.

O mores! usque adeone
scire tuum, nihil est, nisi te scire hoc sciat alter?
. . . . .
at pulchrum est digito monstrari, et dicier, Hic est:
ten' cirratorum centum dictata fuisse
pro nihilo pendas? Ecce inter pocula quaerunt
Romulidae saturi, quid dia poemata narrent.
hic aliquis, cui circum humeros hyacinthina laena est,
rancidulum quiddam balba de nare locutus,
Phyllidas, Hypsipylas, vatum et plorabile si quid,
eliquat, et tenero supplantat verba palato.

assensere viri. Nunc non cinis ille poetae
Felix? non levior cippus nunc opprimit ossa?
laudant convivae: nunc non e manibus illis,
nunc non e tumulo fortunataque favilla
nascentur violae? Rides, ait, et nimis uncis
naribus indulges: an erit qui velle recuset
os populi meruisse; et cedro digna locutus,
linquere nec scombros metuentia carmina, nec thus.

And there could be no more effective way of exposing the frauds of modern poetasters than by reminding the reader of the oblivion that had fallen on the names of their ancient predecessors. Gifford's imitation of the Latin is admirably spirited:

*P.* Thou learned! Alas for learning! She is sped.
And hast thou dimmed thy eyes, and racked thy head,
And broke thy rest for this, for this alone?
And is thy knowledge nothing if not known?
O lost to sense! But still thou criest, 'Tis sweet
To hear "That's He!" from every one we meet;
That's He whom critic Bell declares divine;
For whom the fair diurnal laurels twine;
Whom Magazines, Reviews, conspire to praise,
And Greathead calls the Homer of our days.

*F.* And is it nothing then to hear our name
Thus blazoned by the GENERAL VOICE of Fame?

*P.* Nay it were everything did THAT dispense
The sober verdict found by taste and sense:
But mark OUR jury. O'er the flowing bowl
When wine has drowned all energy of soul,
Ere FARO comes, (a dreary interval)
For some fond fashionable lay they call.
Here the spruce ensign, tottering on his chair,
With lisping accent and affected air,
Recounts the wayward fate of that poor poet
Who born for anguish, and disposed to show it,
Did yet so awkwardly his means employ
That gaping fiends mistook his grief for joy.[1]
Lost in amaze at language so divine,
The audience hiccup and exclaim "Damned fine!"
And are not now the author's ashes blest?
Lies not the turf more lightly on his breast?
Do not sweet violets now around him bloom?
Laurels now burst spontaneous from his tomb?

[1] See Merry's lines quoted on p. 43.

*F.* This is mere mockery: and (in your ear)
Reason is ill refuted by a sneer.
Is praise an evil? Is there to be found
One so indifferent to its soothing sound,
As not to wish hereafter to be known,
And make a long futurity his own;
Rather than——

*P.* With Squire Jerningham descend
To pastry-cooks and moths, and "there an end!"[1]

*The Baviad* attained its end.

"I confess," says its author, in his Preface to *The Maeviad*, "that the work was received more favourably than I expected. Bell, indeed, and a few others, whose craft was touched, vented their indignation in prose and verse; but, on the whole, the clamour against me was not loud; and was lost by insensible degrees in the applauses of such as I was truly ambitious to please. Thus supported, the good effects of the satire (*gloriose loquor*) were not long in manifesting themselves. Della Crusca appeared no more in *The Oracle*, and if any of his followers ventured to treat the town with a soft Sonnet, it was not as before introduced by a pompous preface. Pope and Milton resumed their superiority; and Este and his coadjutors silently acquiesced in the growing opinion of their incompetency, and showed some sense of shame."

A slight attempt to revive the nonsensical style was effectually crushed by *The Maeviad*, an imitation of Horace, Satire x. lib. i., and the war between Gifford and the Cruscans was concluded by the action for libel brought in 1798 by John Williams against Robert Faulder, publisher of *The Baviad* and *The Maeviad*, in which the plaintiff—a wretched scribbler, who had himself practised the lowest arts of literary blackmailing—was non-suited. Having achieved this victory, Gifford served the conservative cause in literature, as editor of *The Anti-Jacobin*, of whose brilliant staff I shall have to take notice in later pages: he was also chosen by John Murray in 1809 as first editor of *The Quarterly Review*, which, though launched in the midst of great

[1] *The Baviad*, 77-114.

trials and difficulties, he succeeded in steering successfully for seventeen years. He died on the 31st of December 1826.

All his critical work bears the stamp of his powerful character and the circumstances of his early education. Its leading virtue is its entire sincerity. He had a passionate love of whatever was true and great in literature, and a corresponding hatred of imposture. Appreciating with intense sympathy the genius of the authors whom he admired, he devoted to their service a hero-worship marked by all the indomitable energy he had shown in his boyish struggle after knowledge. His editions of Ben Jonson, Ford, and Massinger are admirable for the extent of their learning and for their scholarly appreciation of poetical work alien in its qualities to the spirit of his own age. His translation of Juvenal is, perhaps, the best in the language, while, as I have said, the imitation of Persius in *The Baviad* breathes the very air of its original. In his invectives against the Cruscans there is no trace of the personal animosity that inspired Pope in his war with the Dunces: he writes, like Juvenal, under the spur of an indignation produced, by the sight of social and artistic degeneracy, in a mind trained by difficulty and suffering to recognise the realities of life. After his death the many enemies created by the severity of his criticism ascribed this characteristic to his native malignity, but those who knew the real kindliness of his temper, with better reason recognised in his style the intensity of his convictions.[1]

His satire has indeed the defect of his qualities, warped as these were, to some extent, by the sufferings of his boyhood. His great fault is his deficient sense of proportion. Coming late to the study of letters, when the lines of his character had hardened, he did not assimilate the classical influence so fully as those who had experienced it while their minds were still in a flexible state. He surrendered himself at once to the dominion of the authors

[1] On this point see the letter of R. W. Hay to Mr. Murray of July 7, 1856. Smiles' *Memoir of John Murray*, vol. ii. p. 177.

with whom he found himself in sympathy, and his thought on all occasions is steeped in colours derived from his early study of Juvenal. He never attained that air of light and well-bred raillery which so delightfully distinguishes the work of Canning and Frere, his colleagues in *The Anti-Jacobin*. Something of the "tremendous" appears in his indignation against such poor creatures as Merry and Jerningham, the mere ephemerides of fashion; while, in his *Epistle to Peter Pindar*, a sense of his own importance mingles, to a degree unusual in his satire, with affected scorn of his antagonist:

> Unhappy dotard, see! thy hairs are grey—
> In fitter lists thy waning strength display;
> Go, dip thy trembling hands in coward gore,
> And hew down Wests and Copleys by the score;
> But touch not me,—or, to thy peril know,
> I give no easy conquest to the foe.
> Come then, all filth and venom as thou art,
> Rage in thy eye and rancour in thy heart,
> Come with thy boasted arms, spite, malice, lies,
> Smut, scandal, execrations, blasphemies;
> I brave them all. Lo, here I fix my stand,
> And dare the utmost of thy tongue and hand;
> Prepared each threat to baffle, or to spurn,
> Each blow with tenfold vigour to return.[1]

The same man appears in his prose. In his edition of Ben Jonson he shows an almost personal hatred of Drummond of Hawthornden for his strictures on his author;[2] and George Ellis writes to Murray about an article of his in *The Quarterly Review* on Sydney Smith's "Visitation Sermon."

> Gifford, though the best-tempered man alive, is terribly severe with his pen; but S. S. would suffer ten times more by being turned into ridicule (and never did man expose himself so much as he did in that sermon) than from being slashed and cauterised in that manner.[3]

But when all deductions are made, the service that Gifford rendered to good literature ought to be duly

[1] *Epistle to Peter Pindar.*
[2] See Memoir prefixed to edition of Ben Jonson (1865), p. 34.
[3] Smiles's *Memoir of John Murray*, vol. i. p. 184.

recognised. England, on the eve of the French Revolution, had sunk into a state of apparent languor, in which the Constitution seemed to lack strength to throw off the diseases of the body politic. The advent of the younger Pitt to power, supported by the declared voice of Public Opinion, had indeed recovered for the Crown the same just room for its prerogative as it had enjoyed in the time of his father. But the coalition between the Rump of Lord North's party and the great Whig Families, headed by Fox, in a House of Commons largely influenced by the latter, gave ample scope for the violence of faction; and, with a prestige lowered by the disastrous results of the American War, the nation, which alone in Europe represented the cause of liberty, remained without any visible goal towards which to direct its united energies. This decay in the principle of action was necessarily reflected in the sphere of poetry. Deprived of all definite ideals which could be appropriately embodied in any of the traditional forms of the art, the public taste began to dissolve into as many sets and factions as prevailed in the world of politics; nor was there any central authority qualified to check the hosts of pretenders who thrust their claims for a hearing on the good-natured ignorance of society. It was necessary for some one to show the public what the classical spirit really meant. Gifford did this. As Scott said of his *Baviad* and *Maeviad*: "He squashed at one blow a set of coxcombs who might have humbugged the world long enough." The feat needed courage as well as ability, for the Cruscans had the control of an anonymous press, and Gifford knew that Public Opinion was timid as well as sceptical.

*F.* 'Tis well. Here let the indignant stricture cease,
And Leeds at length enjoy his fool in peace.

*P.* Come then, around their works a circle draw,
And near it plant the dragons of the law,
With labels writ "Critics, far hence remove,
Nor dare to censure what the great approve."
I go. Yet Hall could lash with noble rage
This purblind patron of a former age;

And laugh to scorn the eternal sonneteer,
Who made goose pinions and white rags so dear;
Yet Oldham, in his rude unpolished strain,
Could hiss the clamorous and deride the vain,
Who bawled their rhymes incessant through the town,
Or bribed the hawkers for a day's renown.
Whate'er the theme, with honest warmth they wrote,
Nor cared what Mutius of their freedom thought;
Yet prose was venial in that happy time,
And life had other business than to rhyme.
And may not I—now this pernicious pest,
This metromania, creeps through every breast;
Now fools and children void their brains by loads,
And itching grandams spawl lascivious odes;
Now lords and dukes, cursed with a sickly taste,
While Burns' pure healthful nurture runs to waste,
Lick up the spittle of the bed-rid muse,
And riot on the sweepings of the stews;
Say may not I expose——

*F.* No—'tis unsafe.
Prudence, my friend!

*P.* What! not deride? not laugh?
Well! thought at least is free——

*F.* O yet forbear——

*P.* Nay, then, I'll dig a pit, and bury there
The dreadful truth which so alarms thy fears;
THE TOWN, THE TOWN, GOOD PIT, HAS ASSES' EARS.

Shamed by this just satire, the sound part of cultivated opinion roused itself, and—about the same time as the aristocracy, under the exhortations of Burke, were instinctively defining the national policy in opposition to the French Revolution—began to recognise that the true spirit of classical poetry was not to be found in mere forms—whether the impersonations and abstractions of Darwin or the drivelling affectations of the Cruscans—but in the energetic expression of civic ideas. *The Baviad* and *The Maeviad* prepared the way for the revival of the genuine classic manner, as illustrated in the poetry of *The Anti-Jacobin*, the patriotic *Odes* of Campbell, and the *Tales* of Crabbe.

# CHAPTER IV

## DEMOCRACY AND LYRIC POETRY, SCOTTISH AND ENGLISH

### Songs of the People—Robert Burns: Vision Painting—William Blake

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century two poets, one English, one Scottish, appear, whose genius, in most respects strikingly contrasted, in others indicates a common external influence at work, and reflects the power exerted on the individual imagination by the rising spirit of Democracy. In both may be noted a strong centrifugal tendency carrying them away from the standards of faith and conduct recognised by the ruling classes of society, and an abrupt departure from the accepted form of poetical expression. But in the case of Burns this tendency seeks a national channel; his genius is in revolt against the despotism of the ecclesiastical order established in his country; the instrument he employs for the expression of his feelings is the vernacular dialect of the people. Blake's rebellion is purely personal, and is directed mainly against the aesthetic principles of the age: his poetry embodies an attempt to express abstract mystical sentiment in metrical language characterised, as far as possible, by the clear imagery and outlines proper to the art of painting.

As regards the poetry of Burns:—Scotland in the eighteenth century may be described as being under the rule of an oligarchical theocracy, combining the features of aristocratic feudalism with Calvinistic theology. Never-

theless, the Scottish Kirk itself was confronted with a resistance on the part of the people, strengthened by many influences arising out of mediaeval and patriotic traditions. Chief among these was the national antagonism to England, which, nourished on the memories of ancient independence and sentimental attachment to the dynasty of the Stuarts, long weighed in the popular mind against the material advantages derived from the Union. Shared by all classes of the community, the sense of national kinship helped to level those social distinctions which the remains of feudalism made more pronounced in Scotland than in England; and since the Kirk threw its influence on the side of the Union, popular sympathy was often to a corresponding extent enlisted on the side opposed to the ecclesiastical Constitution.

These centrifugal tendencies were reflected in the selection by the Scottish poets of national themes; in their imitation of national manners; and, most particularly of all, in the revival of the vernacular dialect as an instrument of metrical composition. James I. of Scotland had introduced into his kingdom the poetical practice of Chaucer and Gower;[1] but though Henryson, Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas continued to cultivate the southern style, they did not attempt to naturalise the English literary diction. A step in this direction was taken in the reign of James I. of England by two Scottish poets, Sir William Alexander and William Drummond of Hawthornden, the latter of whom is entitled to rank among the foremost refiners of English versification between the age of Drayton and the age of Pope. For a considerable period it seemed as if the accession of the Stuarts to the throne of England would cause this classical tendency to prevail in the northern as well as in the southern kingdom. But local influences proved the stronger; and after the Act of Union Allan Ramsay, reverting in his own practice to the dialect of his predecessors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, made the first Collection of ancient Scottish Songs and Ballads,

[1] Vol. i. pp. 363-80.

which, as I have already shown, gave so powerful an impulse to the Romantic revival.[1] It is true that the metrical style of Ramsay was still dominated by the English classical tradition. Edinburgh followed the lead of London in the institution of Clubs and Coffee-houses, and Ramsay was a member of the Easy Club, a society which imitated Button's alike in its conviviality and its literary principles. But he soon grafted on his Addisonian classicism an imitation of the old Scottish colloquial speech, cast into forms of native verse, which, however much they had languished, had never been completely disused.

These he employed for various purposes. Sometimes, as in *The Vision*, he made them the vehicle of Jacobite sentiment: sometimes, as in the cantos added to *Christ's Kirk on the Green*—where a rustic wedding is described with all the coarse realism of Flemish paintings representing a "Kermesse"—he used them for the portraiture of Scottish manners: most successful of all, was his revival of the elegiac stanza, employed by the Sempills in the seventeenth century, as in later days by Fergusson and Burns. By Ramsay was sounded the first note of that rebellion against the ecclesiastical tyranny of the Kirk, which became a tradition with his successors. His most notable composition in this class is perhaps the *Elegy on John Cowper*, Kirk-treasurer's assistant, an officer entrusted with the execution of sentences on the large class of offenders, male and female, who were condemned by the Kirk to sit on the stool of Repentance. It begins:

> I warn ye a' to greet and drone:
> John Cowper's dead—"Ohon! Ohon!"
> To fill his part alake there's none
> That with sic speed
> Could sa'r[2] sculdudry out like John:
> But now he's deid![3]

Though Ramsay had the prime merit of initiating a poetical movement, and though his fame was more

[1] Vol. v. pp. 364-7, and pp. 410-11.
[2] Scent.
[3] *Poems of Allan Ramsay* (Alex. Gardner, 1877), vol. i. p. 165.

extended, he was inferior in point of genius and artistic skill to his successor, Robert Fergusson. The son of William Fergusson, an accountant in the British Linen Company, this poet was born in Edinburgh on the 5th of September 1750. He was sent at an early age to an English school in the city, taught by one Philip, from which he passed to the High School, and from that, at the age of thirteen, to the University of St. Andrews, where he showed proficiency in the study of Latin and Greek. It is on record that he was expelled from the University for riotous behaviour in 1767; his offence, however, cannot have been very serious, as he was almost immediately readmitted. He had been intended for the ministry, but, leaving the University before his preparation for it was completed, he returned to Edinburgh, and obtained a situation in the Office of the Commissary Clerk. His daily work, which consisted mainly in copying extracts from deeds and protests, was as distasteful to him as similar tasks were to Chatterton, and he sought relaxation in clubs and taverns, amusing the company he found there by his practical jokes and the liveliness of his verses. In time his health, always delicate, broke down under stress of his dissipated habits: loss of reason followed, and it became necessary to send him to a lunatic asylum, in which, after a confinement of two months, he died on the 16th of October 1774, aged only twenty-four years.

Fergusson, like Ramsay, wrote both in literary English and in the vernacular. The former class of his poems comprises Odes, Pastorals, Elegies, Mock-heroics, in all of which the predominant influence of the Classical Renaissance is not less plainly visible than is the imitation of such English writers as Collins, Gray, and Shenstone. In many of his "Scots Poems" there is also an unmistakable English manner, shown by the frequent use of the heroic couplet and the coupling of substantives and adjectives; while the element of what would now be called "particularism" is marked simply by the choice of the subject and the distinction of dialect

Fergusson was in a special sense the poet of Edinburgh, the manners of which city he reproduced in verse with as much liveliness as Smollett had shown in the prose of *Humphrey Clinker*. He had, however, a model for his *Auld Reekie* in the *Trivia* of Gay, whose minutely detailed manner he copies in descriptions of the lighting and the law-courts, the "Bucks" and "Maccaronis," the street-cries and even the smells, of the Scottish Capital. Gay gives the necessary mock-heroic air to his subject by a lofty classical style: Fergusson, on the other hand, shows his affection for his native city by his appropriate use of a colloquial vocabulary which allows touches of homely humour and sentiment. His classical training was of good service to him in his patriotic verse; and the genuine spirit of the Renaissance breathes in his Eclogues, *The Mutual Complaint of Plainstanes and Causey*, the *Dialogue between Brandy and Whisky*, and *The Ghaists*, poems which Burns has imitated in his *Brigs of Ayr*, without (if an Englishman may presume to venture on a comparison of two Scottish poets) attaining an equal measure of artistic success. Fergusson's Elegies, written in *rime couée*, are better than Ramsay's, and though his lyrical description of manners in *Leith Races* and *The Election* does not equal Burns's *Hallowe'en*, *The Farmer's Ingle* seems to me to have a more genuine classical movement than *The Cotter's Saturday Night*:

The fient a cheep's amang the bairnies now;
For a' their anger's wi' their hunger gane:
Ay maun the childer, wi' a fastin' mou',
Grumble, and greet, and mak' an unco mane.
In rangles round, before the ingle's lowe,
Frae Gudame's mouth auld-warld tales they hear,
O' warlocks[1] loupin' round the wirrikow:[2]
O' ghaists that win in glen and kirkyard drear;
Whilk touzles a' their tap, and gars them shake wi' fear.

For weel she trows that fiends and fairies be
Sent from the deil to fleetch us to our ill;
That kye hae tint their milk wi' evil e'e;
And corn been scowdered in the glowin' kill.

[1] Witches. [2] Scare-crow.

O mock na this, my friends! but rather mourn,
Ye in life's brawest spring wi' reason clear;
Wi' eild our idle fancies a' return,
And dim our dolefu' days wi' bairnly fear:
The mind's ay cradled whan the grave is near.[1]

But both Ramsay and Fergusson use the vernacular as if it were something exterior to themselves, a material useful for producing metrical effects proper to poetic diction: language is not with them, as it is with Burns, a lyrical instrument responsive to every inward movement of passion and imagination: in range of fancy, geniality of humour, and fineness of artistic taste, they stand on a level much below their great disciple, generous though the latter was in exalting their merits as the first explorers of the poetical region which he made so peculiarly his own.

Robert Burns was born on the 25th of January 1759. He was the eldest son of William Burness or Burns, who, after working as a gardener in the service of the Provost of Ayr, had rented a small farm in the neighbouring parish of Alloway. At the age of six years Robert was put under the tuition of one John Murdoch, a lad of eighteen, with scholarly tastes and a keen appreciation of the style of literary English then in vogue; so that from his earliest boyhood Burns was lifted into an imaginative atmosphere beyond the sphere of his daily life, and, according to his brother Gilbert, soon "became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression."[2] Before he was fourteen he had read Fielding's and Smollett's novels, as well as the histories of Hume and Robertson; while a present from Murdoch of Pope's Works had a powerful influence on his English style, and gave a sensible impulse to his faculty for satire. In 1767 his father moved to a farm at Mount Oliphant, described by the poet as being of the poorest land in Ayrshire, and here for twelve years Robert's life was absorbed in occupations which, he declares, combined "the cheerless

[1] *Works of Robert Fergusson* (1807), p. 287.
[2] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. iv. p. 238.

gloom of a hermit with the unceasing toil of a galley slave." At Kirkoswald, a smuggling village in the neighbourhood, he sought some relaxation from this drudgery, and began "to look unconcernedly on a large tavern bill and mix without fear in a drunken squabble."[1] His ardent imagination sought to expand itself in more romantic regions, and when, he himself being eighteen years of age, his father removed to a farm at Lochlie in Tarbolton parish, he plunged into a succession of somewhat indiscriminate love affairs. At the same time he was weighed down by his own labours and his father's embarrassments, and it may be this state to which he alludes in the following passage of his autobiography:

> There was a certain period of my life that my spirit was broke by repeated losses and disasters, which threatened, and indeed effected, the utter ruin of my fortune. My body too was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a hypochondria or confirmed melancholy. In this wretched state, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder, I hung my harp on the willow trees, except in some lucid intervals, in one of which I composed the following;—viz. the lines beginning "O Thou great Being."[2]

He also wrote the striking song "My father was a farmer," in which he says:

> Then sore harassed, and tired at last with fortune's vain delusion; O!
> I dropt my schemes, like idle dreams, and came to this conclusion; O!
> The past was bad, and the future hid; its good or ill untrièd; O!
> But the present hour was in my power, and so I would enjoy it; O![3]

His resolution, carried into practice with ardour and vehemence, soon brought on a collision between Burns and the rigid Inquisitors of the Kirk; and, as the result of an intrigue with one Jean Armour (who afterwards became his wife), both parties were in 1786 publicly rebuked before the congregation by William Auld, Minister of Mauchline, the parish in which Burns was then farming. Public Opinion in the neighbourhood had already been displeased by the harshness with which the Kirk ecclesi-

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. iv. pp. 242-5.
[2] *Reliques of Robert Burns* (Cromek), p. 328.
[3] *Poetry of Burns* (Henley), vol. iv. p. 9.

astics had treated trivial breaches of Sabbatarian rules; so that much popular sympathy was excited on behalf of the new offenders; and to this Burns gave expression in a series of satires against orthodox Calvinism, including *The Holy Fair*, *The Twa Herds*, *Holy Willie's Prayer*, and *The Kirk's Alarm*. By these poems his reputation spread so widely through the countryside that he became desirous of making a public appearance as an author. He accordingly agreed with Wilson, a printer of Kilmarnock, for the production of his poems, the first edition of which was issued in July 1786. Though it consisted of 600 copies and was exhausted in a month, Wilson declined to publish a second edition, unless part of the expense was guaranteed to him; and, as Burns was at the time in difficulties with his farm of Mossgiel, he was unable to meet the printer's requirement. So great was his despondency that he had almost determined to leave Scotland for the West Indies, and gave utterance to the feelings that overpowered him in the well-known lines, "The gloomy night is gathering fast."[1] He was, however, diverted from his purpose on reading a letter from Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet, to a common friend, in which, after pressing for a reissue of the volume, the writer declared: "Its intrinsic merit and the exertions of the author's friends might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been published within my memory."[2] Thus encouraged, Burns made a journey to Edinburgh in the hope of finding a publisher. He was received in the Capital with enthusiasm by all classes: subscribers offered themselves in numbers; and arrangements for a fresh issue of his poems were made with William Creech, by whom the second edition of the Kilmarnock volume was published in April 1787. The venture proved very successful. Burns says in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop that he expected to make about £450 from the profits of the sale;[3] and whatever was the amount he actually received, he found

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. p. 255.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. iv. p. 294.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. iv. p. 301.

himself able to go on several tours in different parts of Scotland, and eventually to start on a fresh farm in Dumfriesshire with the remainder of his capital. Being still pursued by his old ill-luck in agriculture, he obtained in 1789, through the influence of his friends, an appointment as Exciseman for the district in which his farm was situated. In 1788 he had married Jean Armour, by whom he had already had two illegitimate children; and, by her good management and her sisters', he was able to convert his holding into a dairy farm, while he himself carried on his work for the Excise. At this period he wrote some of his finest songs for two collections of national music, James Johnson's *Musical Museum* (1787-1796) and George Johnson's *Scottish Airs* (1792-1796). In other respects his new life does not seem to have been beneficial to him. He became confirmed in his dissipated habits; gave just cause of offence to those in a rank superior to his own, who had at first gladly welcomed him to their society; and, though an officer of the Government, ostentatiously sought the company of men who were disaffected to it. At last his health broke down completely, and he died on the 21st July 1796.

The genius of Burns was in every respect lyrical. At one time, indeed, he seems to have meditated writing for the stage. "In my early years," he says, "nothing less would serve me than courting the tragic muse. I was, I think, eighteen or nineteen when I sketched the outlines of a tragedy."[1] It is fortunate that he did not pursue the attempt, for, from what remains of the composition referred to, it is plain that he had no conception of the requirements either of tragic action or tragic diction. He had, no doubt, a keen appreciation, as is shown by his *Jolly Beggars*, of the humours of real life; but this work is rightly executed in the form of a "Cantata," divided, in musical fashion, between "Recitative" and "Airs." The lyrical form prevails even in his poems of action. His most successful satires are songs or monologues in character. *Tam O' Shanter* is a master-

[1] *Reliques of Robert Burns* (Cromek), p. 405.

piece, causing regret that he did not more frequently write short metrical tales in the vernacular; but it is a solitary example of Burns's narrative verse. His powers are most fully exhibited when he is finding a form of expression for his own passions, prejudices, and sentiments; and this he does, according as his mood suggests, either in literary English, in a mixture of literary English and Scottish vernacular, or in the vernacular pure and simple.

An acute and appreciative critic of Burns describes his practice as follows:

> The truth is that he wrote two lyric styles: (1) the style of the eighteenth century Song-Books, which is a bad one, and in which he could be as vulgar, or as frigid, or as tame, as very much smaller men; and (2) the style of the Vernacular Folk-Song, which he handled with that understanding and that mastery of means and ends which stamps the artist. To consider his experiments in the first is to scrape an acquaintance with *Clarinda*, *Mistress of my Soul*, and *Turn again, thou fair Eliza*, and *On a Bank of Flowers*, and *Sensibility, How Charming*, and *Castle Gordon*, and *A Big-Bellied Bottle*, and *Strathallan's Lament*, and *Raving Winds around her Blowing*, and *How Pleasant the Banks*, and *A Rosebud by my Early Walk*, and many a thing besides, which, were it not known for the work of a great poet, would long since have gone down into the limbo that gapes for would-be art. In the other are all the little master-pieces by which Burns the lyrist is remembered. He had a lead in *The Silver Tassie*, and in *Auld Lang Syne*, and in *A Man's a Man*, and *Duncan Davison*, in *A Waukrife Minnie* and *Duncan Gray* and *Finlay*, in *I Hae a Wife*, and *It was a' for Our Rightfu' King* and *A Red Red Rose*, in *Macpherson's Lament*, and *Ay Waukin, O*, and *Somebody* and *Whistle and I'll Come to You*— in all, or very nearly all, the numbers which make his lyrical bequest, as it were, a little park apart,—an unique retreat of rocks and sylvan corners, and heathy spaces, with an abundance of wildings, and here and there a hawthorn brake, where, to a sound of running water, the Eternal Shepherd tells his tale—in the spacious and smiling demesne of English Literature.[1]

[1] *The Poetry of Burns.* By William Ernest Henley and Thomas F. Henderson, vol. iv. pp. 329-31. While I think it to be regretted that the late Mr. Henley should have chosen to write the Life of Burns with an affectation of bravado, I sincerely admire the general soundness of his critical judgment and the thoroughness with which he and his co-editor have tracked the sources of Burns's inspiration.

Though this is true, as far as it goes, it is not the whole truth. Looking at the matter in a broader aspect, we can see that Burns was the first poet in the eighteenth century, indeed in the whole range of English literature, to treat lyrically the elementary emotions of human nature as they are experienced in the individual breast. His lyrical style is equally remote from that of Gray and Collins, who are inspired by the Classical Renaissance, and from the fanciful, metaphysical manner of seventeenth century poets like Herrick, Cowley, and Marvell, whose thought is still strongly coloured with the ideas of the Middle Ages. "Unacquainted," he says in the preface to the first edition of his poems (Kilmarnock), "with the necessary requisites for commencing poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him in his and their native language." Burns was a man of many moods and complex feelings, and, like all Scots who in the eighteenth century used their native language for metrical purposes, he was penetrated by the influences of English refinement. He had been trained by his earliest teacher to perceive the qualities of the literary style then in fashion, and had proved himself an apt pupil. When he went to his work in the fields he carried with him an English song-book which he carefully studied; so that he early acquired a mastery over the English language on its literary, as apart from its social, side. His genius and judgment made him keenly appreciative of the beauties in the verse of a poet like Gray. For some of his moods the idiomatic English of the period was a more fitting vehicle than his own vernacular. Beyond one or two words, that might equally well have been used in their English form, there is nothing peculiarly Scottish in the famous lines beginning "Ae fond kiss and then we sever"; nor could any English poet have expressed more artistically the genuine feeling expressed in the following stanzas, written after the rejection by Jean Armour of his proposals of marriage:

No idly feigned poetic pains
My sad love-lorn lamentings claim;
No shepherd's pipe—arcadian strains,
No fabled tortures quaint and tame.
The plighted faith, the mutual flame,
The oft attested Powers above,
The promised father's tender name,
These were the pledges of my love!

Encircled in her clasping arms,
How have the raptured moments flown!
How have I wished for Fortune's charms
For her dear sake, and hers alone!
And must I think it? is she gone,
My secret heart's exulting boast?
And does she heedless hear my groan?
And is she ever, ever lost?

O can she bear so base a heart,
So lost to honour, lost to truth,
As from the fondest lover part,
The plighted husband of her youth?
Alas! life's path may be unsmooth,
Her way may lie through rough distress;
Then who her pangs and pains will soothe,
Her sorrows share, and make them less?[1]

The same is true of these well-known lines:

Still o'er these scenes my memory wakes,
And fondly broods with miser care.
Time but th' impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.
O Mary, dear departed shade,
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?[2]

It is true that the particular poems, which Mr. Henley mentions, written in literary English, have no artistic value; but that is because the feeling they seek to convey is itself false or artificial; and because the poet tries to assume the mannered tone of a class with which he is not familiar. For the same reason Burns is not always successful in his mingling of the Scottish vernacular with classical English. Compared with the passage I have

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. pp. 124-5.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 72.

already cited from Fergusson's *Farmer's Ingle*, there seems to be in the following stanzas from *The Cotter's Saturday Night* an air of facile commonplace:

> The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face
> They round the ingle form a circle wide.
> The sire turns o'er wi' patriarchal grace,
> The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride.
> His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
> His lyart haffets [1] wearing thin and bare;
> Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
> He wales [2] a portion with judicious care,
> And "Let us worship God!" he says with solemn air.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
> That makes her loved at home, revered abroad:
> Princes and lords are but the breath of kings;
> "An honest man's the noblest work of God";
> And, certes, in fair Virtue's heavenly road
> The cottage leaves the palace far behind;
> What is a lordling's pomp? a cumbrous load,
> Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
> Studied in arts of Hell, in wickedness refined.[3]

I cannot agree, however, with Mr. Henley's sweeping depreciation of all Burns's compromises of style between English and Scottish; and instead of thinking that "the English parts of *Tam O' Shanter* are of no particular merit as poetry," [4] there is to my mind, in the change of key from the lines beginning "But pleasures are like poppies spread," to those beginning "Weel mounted on his grey mare, Meg," an admirable example of artistic judgment. The slight tinge of Doric in *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, and in *Mary Morison*, produces exactly the effect required to imprint on the sublime or pathetic universality of sentiment in these poems a distinctively Scottish character.

Still, it is unquestionable that Burns's most profoundly representative verse is found in his more purely vernacular songs and poems, where—to repeat his own words—"he sings the sentiments and manners he saw and felt in himself and his rustic compeers, in his and their native language." These embrace descriptions of manners,

[1] Grey side-locks. [2] Chooses. [3] *Cotter's Saturday Night*, xii. xix.
[4] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. iv. p. 263.

satires, elegies, epistles, and folk-songs. In each class he had a poetical predecessor whose style he imitated, while raising it into regions of enthusiasm far beyond the reach of the original master; and in all of them the emotion expressed is not private to himself, but common to the great mass of his countrymen. His originality lies entirely in the discovery of the right poetical form appropriate to each particular subject.

For example, the first suggestion of *The Holy Fair* is evidently due to Fergusson's *Leith Races*. From Fergusson Burns takes his metre and his opening ideas. The elder poet describes how in "July month" he met the impersonation of Mirth, who invites him to make holiday with her on Leith Sands: his disciple falls in "upon a simmer morn" with three "hizzies," who prove to be Superstition, Hypocrisy, and Fun, the last of whom takes the poet with her to witness the doings at Mauchline Holy Fair on Communion Sunday. On this borrowed foundation Burns builds a poetical structure incomparable for truth, vivacity, and satiric humour. The strangely compounded character of the Scottish peasant in the eighteenth century is portrayed in colours unfading as those in which Chaucer sets before us the humours of his mediæval pilgrims. We see the company thronging to the Kirk—farmers with their cottagers from the hillside, websters from the town, women from all parts, carrying their stools and provisions, some moved by the love of pulpit oratory and metaphysical discourse, others desiring to see and be seen, others meditating assignations. At the door of the tent where the preaching is to be held stands the elder, to take the twopenny toll from all who enter; at the back there is a passage communicating with a neighbouring ale-house, to which the congregation can retire to drink and debate in the intervals between the several sermons. Burns seizes the opportunity to satirise with vivacity the various styles of preaching affected by his chief enemies among the Scottish Clergy. The tent empties or fills according as the pulpit is occupied by the fiery apostle of Election and Predestination, the cold rationalist, or the glib

champion of orthodoxy: it is most crowded when the theme presented is the future punishment awaiting rebels against the authority of the Kirk:

But now the Lord's ain trumpet touts
Till a' the hills are rairin',
And echoes back return the shouts;
Black Russell is na spairin':
His piercin' words, like Highlan' swords,
Divide the joints an' marrow;
His talk o' Hell, where devils dwell,
Our verra sauls does harrow
Wi' fright that day.

A vast, unbottomed, boundless pit,
Filled fu' o' lowin' brunstane,
Whase ragin' flame an' scorchin' heat
Wad melt the hardest whunstane!
The half-asleep start up wi' fear,
An' think they hear it roarin';
When presently it does appear
'Twas but some neebor snorin',
Asleep that day.[1]

Another poem of the same class is *Hallowe'en*, in which the poet describes "the simple pleasures of the lowly train," customary in Scotland on that night. In his satires and elegies there are two leading features; the first of these being the admirable range and variety of the human feelings which he is able to express. At one time he strikes our imagination with the audaciously dramatic conception of the character portrayed, as, for example, the mixture of sincerity and self-delusion, making up the intolerance of the Elect, in *Holy Willie's Prayer*:

O Thou that in the Heavens does dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best Thysel',
Sends ane to Heaven an' ten to Hell,
A' for Thy glory,
And no for onie gude or ill
They've done before Thee!

I bless and praise Thy matchless might,
When thousands Thou hast left in night,

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. pp. 44-5.

That I am here before Thy sight
For gifts an' grace,
A burnin' and a shinin' light
To a' this place.

What was I, or my generation,
That I should get sic exaltation,
I wha deserved most just damnation
For broken laws,
Sax thousan' years ere my creation,
Thro' Adam's cause!

. . . . .

Yet I am here a chosen sample,
To show Thy grace is great and ample,
I'm here a pillar o' Thy temple,
Strong as a rock,
A guide, a buckler, and example,
To a' Thy flock.[1]

At another time he sounds a note of infinite pity and tenderness, as in his address to the Field Mouse whose nest he has destroyed with his plough :

Thy wee-bit housie too in ruin!
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin'!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's win's ensuin'
Baith snell and keen![2]

or to the Mountain Daisy, equally unfortunate :

Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flow'r,
Thou's met me in an evil hour,
For I maun crash amang the stoure[3]
Thy slender stem :
To spare thee now is past my power,
Thou bonnie gem![4]

From this serious style again he can pass with no less felicity to passages of humorous description, the best example of which is perhaps to be found in *Death and Doctor Hornbook*. The picture of the movements of a semi-drunken man in the following stanzas cannot be surpassed :

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. ii. pp. 25-7.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 113-14.
[3] Dust.
[4] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. p. 136.

The clachan yill [1] had made me canty; [2]
I was na fou,[3] but just had plenty:
I stachered whyles,[4] but yet took tent ay
To free the ditches;
An' hillocks, stanes, and bushes kent ay
Frae ghaists an' witches.

The rising moon began to glow'r [5]
The distant Cumnock hills out-owre:
To count her horns wi' a' my pow'r
I set mysel';
But whether she had three or four
I could na tell.

I was come round about the hill,
An' todlin' doun on Willie's mill,
Settin' my staff wi' a' my skill
To keep me sicker; [6]
Tho' leeward, whyles, against my will
I took a bicker.[7]

The other prominent feature in Burns's satires and elegies is the artistic judgment shown in his choice of a metrical instrument. Almost every form of his vernacular verse has its prototype far back in Scottish poetry. The antique source of his inspiration is seen in the Provençal origin of his favourite stanza, as appears from the following:

Farai un vers de dreit nen,
Non er de mi ni d'autra gen,
Non er d'amor ni de joven,
Ni de ren au,
Qu'enans fo trobatz en durmen
Sobre chevau.[8]

This form of stanza, so often employed by Burns for elegiac purposes—with such a burden as "Poor Mailie's dead,'—is found as early as the seventeenth century in the verse of Sir Robert Sempill of Beltries:

[1] Ale. [2] Jolly. [3] Drunk.
[4] Staggered now and then. [5] Stare. [6] Steady.
[7] Run. Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. p. 192.
[8] William IX., Count of Poitiers, as cited in Henley's *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. p. 336.

Kilbarchan now may say, Alace!
For sho has lost her *game and grace*,
Baith *Trixie* and the *Maiden Trace*,
Bot quhat remeed?
For na man can supply his place—
Hab Simson's deid.[1]

I have already extracted a stanza from Allan Ramsay's *Elegy on John Cowper*, which shows how the model was revived in the early part of the eighteenth century; and Fergusson's Elegies *On the Death of Scots Music* and *On the Death of Mr. David Gregory* carry on the traditional manner. The latter poet employs it also for epistolary purposes in his *Answer to Mr. J. S.'s Epistle*, on which Burns modelled his *Epistle to William Simpson of Ochiltree*. Burns, however, far surpassed all his predecessors in the colloquial ease, vigour, and harmony with which he handled the vernacular style.

The same qualities reappear, perhaps even more characteristically, in his folk-songs. His contributions to the two Scottish anthologies mentioned before are built for the most part on old foundations. They are in every sense products of the ancient Scottish Minstrelsy. The Bard in Scotland had survived longer than in England, in proportion as the former country had preserved more of the life and spirit of the Middle Ages. His twofold vocation of poet and musician had left traces of itself in the memory of each countryside, and from many a cottage door the traveller might hear wafted snatches of melodies which lingered in the ear and heart of the people long after the names of the composers had been suffered to perish. In time the music itself would doubtless have died away, if it had not awaked in the imagination of Burns an echo that he knew how to make immortal. Feeling intensely the beauty of the old national airs and the significance of the homely words to which they were wedded, he selected from all quarters, with the refinement of genius, quaint phrases, ancient burdens, humorous turns of speech, and gave them new

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. i. p. 345.

life in a context more poetical than the primary setting. For example, he writes to Thomson respecting *Auld Lang Syne*:

> The air is but mediocre; but the following Song—the old song of the olden times, and which has never been in print, or even in manuscript, until I took it down from an old man's singing—is enough to recommend any air.

Nobody will doubt that this account of the song is fictitious, or that the words of the song are in reality Burns' own; nevertheless, the burden and the pathetic opening, which suggested to him his idea, were in existence at least as early as 1711, and had been used by Allan Ramsay in a song of different purport.[1] Burns rightly claimed *John Anderson, my Jo*, as his own; but the structure of the stanza was already at his disposal in an older song, reprinted in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, the vulgar tone of which may be judged by the opening:

> John Anderson, my jo, John,
> I wonder what you mean,
> To rise so soon in the morning,
> And sit up so late at e'en.
> You'll blear out your eyn, John,
> And why will you do so?
> Come sooner to your bed at e'en,
> John Anderson, my jo.[2]

While the burden of *Green grow the rashes, O!* is borrowed from Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*;[3] and that of *For a' that and a' that* has its origin in a Jacobite song;[4] the artistic adaptation of the words and air to a new context is in both cases thoroughly original. Not less is this the case in such famous songs as *Coming thro' the Rye, poor Bodie*,[5] *Whistle and I'll come to you, my Lad*,[6] *Duncan Gray*,[7] and many another, the lowly motive for which may be found in broad-sides, chap-books, and song-books, Scottish and English, where it might have

[1] Henley, *Poetry of Burns*, vol. iii. pp. 407-10.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 349.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 414.
[4] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 489.
[5] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 411.
[6] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 304.
[7] *Ibid.* vol. iii. pp. 321, 452.

been buried and forgotten, had it not been revived by Burns, and preserved for ever in the larger and loftier atmosphere of national poetry.

From all this it will be seen that the lyrical style of Burns is eminently social. Not only do we feel in it the imagination of a great poet, but we hear the voice of an historic people, in whose heart many ancient elements, mediæval, religious, feudal, are in a state of ferment, produced by the growing movement of democracy. The living genius of the Renaissance is seen to be still inspiring the poet in the strong common sense with which he masters his materials; at the same time the forms which he employs are not Classical but Romantic. Nothing of the kind is to be found in the contemporary lyric poetry of England. Yet in that too may be observed certain undercurrents of imagination running apart from the main channels of national taste, and indicating the presence of new forces destined soon to transform the whole life and constitution of society. I have referred in the last volume to the progress of the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century, and have shown how closely it was allied with the unrepresented elements of democracy, and how intimately the hymnology which sprang from it appealed to the feelings of the people.[1] The religious sources of Charles Wesley's hymns were to a very great extent mystical, and although their diction was masculine, and (in the genuine sense of the word) classical, the centrifugal spirit of Nonconformity only needed to advance a few points to carry the imagination into the regions of Transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is the atmosphere pervading the poetry of Blake, which I propose to deal with in this place, less on account of any effect it produced at the time on the development of the art of poetry in England, than because of the instructive contrast it presents in principle to the character of the poetry of Burns.

William Blake, the son of an Irishman who had changed his name from O'Neil, and, leaving his native

[1] Vol. v. chap. xi.

country, had settled as a hosier in London, was born at 21 Broad Street, near Golden Square, on the 28th of November 1757. His father was a disciple of Swedenborg. That mystical Evangelist had prophesied that in the year 1757, the old world having ended, all things would henceforth be made new, a saying which evidently sank deeply into the mind of young Blake, from the coincidence of the supposed Revolution with the year of his birth, and which contributed largely to the particular form assumed by his mysticism. At a very early age he began to see visions: he met angels in his walks, and conversed with the Hebrew Prophets in the fields near London. He was never sent to school, but, having shown a talent for painting, was put to learn drawing from one Parr, with whom he studied for three or four years, passing from him to an apprenticeship of two years under Basire, an engraver. His hasty temper brought him into such difficulties with his fellow-students that Basire thought it best to send him by himself to copy the monuments in Westminster Abbey, and in this occupation he spent five years, drinking in the influences of Gothic architecture, and casting his ideas into poetry.

In his twentieth year his apprenticeship came to an end. He became an independent engraver, and soon made the acquaintance of Flaxman and Fuseli, who, with a few other kindred spirits, made up a literary coterie, which met in the house of one Matthews, a clergyman. By them Blake was aided in 1783 to publish his first volume of poems, entitled *Poetical Sketches*. Perhaps the indifference with which the book was received by the public irritated a temper naturally violent: at any rate Blake quarrelled with his partner—a fellow-apprentice who had joined him in the business of print-selling in 1784—and wrote a satire upon the Matthews coterie full of vehement invective against the thought and taste of the age. In course of time his poetry began to show the effects of his communion with spirits. He had taken his younger brother Robert as an apprentice in 1784. In 1787 Robert died, and one night soon after his death

appeared to William, showing him how to engrave his poems upon copper, and to decorate the border of each page. In the form thus revealed to him Blake published in 1789 *Songs of Innocence*, together with *The Book of Thel*, the first of those *Prophetic Books* which he believed to be dictated by supernatural inspiration.

"I have written this poem," he said, at a later date, speaking of his *Jerusalem*, "twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered non-existent, and an immense poem exists which seems the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study."

In the transcription of these mystical prophecies he continued till 1804, writing during the same period *Songs of Experience* and *Ideas of Good and Evil*. The last three years of this period he spent in the village of Felpham in Sussex, and in the exceedingly uncongenial society of the poetaster Hayley, who had employed him in engraving the illustrations for his *Life of Cowper*. After 1804 he seems to have ceased poetical composition, and to have passed into his really great epoch of pictorial invention. This took the form of illustration, his subjects being chosen from other men's poetry, and it comprised engravings for Robert Blair's *Grave* (1804-5), designs for *The Book of Job* (1821), for water-colour illustrations for Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1822) and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1825). Blake died on the 12th of August 1827.

The imaginative style of this poet reveals throughout the natural genius of a painter, which, had it been disciplined in that great age of the art in England, and been directed always to intelligible objects, might have made Blake the foremost of English masters in the heroic class of painting; though such self-control would doubtless have deprived his work of some of the characteristic extravagance which, in the eyes of his devout admirers, is his greatest merit. This was not to be. The poverty of his family prevented him in his early days from pursuing his studies as a painter on liberal lines: his own generous feeling suggested his apprenticeship to an engraver: his

father's indulgence left him without the discipline of school; and, at an age when the mind is most open to impressions, he steeped his thought in the writings of Swedenborg. Everything conspired to persuade him that his probably unequalled power of calling up the images of unseen things was given to him as a direct revelation of the invisible world: yet even so it was long before he surrendered his judgment unreservedly to spiritual impulse. When he published his first volume, *Poetical Sketches*, he asked the indulgence of his readers in a modest tone recalling the similar appeal of Burns:

> The following Sketches were the production of untutored youth, commenced in his twelfth, and occasionally resumed by the author till his twentieth, year; since which time, his talents having been wholly directed to the attainment of excellence in his profession, he has been deprived of the leisure requisite for such a revisal of these sheets as might have rendered them less unfit to meet the public eye.
>
> Conscious of the irregularities and defects found on almost every page, his friends still believed that they possessed a poetical originality which merited some respite from oblivion. These opinions remain, however, to be now re-proved or confirmed by a less partial public.

The poems in the volume, indeed, far from being mature works of art, were evidently the production of a boy. Some of them were faint echoes of what the poet had read;[1] others were inartistic imitations of well-marked poetical styles:[2] in point of rhythm and rhyme many of them were singularly defective. Nevertheless, originality, blended with invention, was everywhere visible: a charming freshness and simplicity of feeling, and an exuberant wealth of imagery, gave character to the poems. In the following stanza, for example, the mixture of the seventeenth and eighteenth century manners is very significant, as showing the extent to which Blake's early work was the result of literary imitation:

[1] See the imitation of Shakespeare in the song beginning, "My silks and fine array." Yeats, *Poems of William Blake*, p. 7.

[2] As in the "Imitation of Spenser," *Poems of William Blake* (W. B. Yeats), p. 13.

With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
*And Phoebus fired my vocal rage*:
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.[1]

But in the next stanza the extraordinary picturesqueness of the image strikes an "original" note:

He loves to sit and hear me sing;
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
*Then stretches out my golden wing*,
And mocks my loss of liberty.[2]

Here and there too was to be found a little poem perfect in sentiment and form, such as the lines *To the Muses*:

Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the Sun, that now
From ancient melodies have ceased;

Whether in heaven ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the earth,
Or the blue regions of the air,
Where the melodious winds have birth;

Whether on crystal rocks ye rove
Beneath the bosom of the sea,
Wandering in many a coral grove,
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry;

How have you left the ancient love,
That bards of old enjoyed in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move,
The sound is forced, the notes are few.[3]

A fragment of a drama, *Edward III.*, essentially undramatic, and imperfect in its rhythms, has many fine lines breathing ardent thoughts on death and immortality. But there is in these youthful lyrics scarcely any trace of the mysticism which in later years became the predominant note in Blake's poetry. As I have already suggested, self-esteem, irritated by the public insensibility to genius, may have been, in part at least, the cause of the increasing arrogance with which he afterwards asserted the supernatural truth of his visions. Swedenborg's interpretation of the Scriptures, on which his mind had

[1] *Poems of William Blake* (Yeats), p. 7.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 7.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 12.

been nurtured in childhood, colours all the *Songs of Innocence*: the underlying idea is of a golden age of humanity, which has been obscured by the blindness and corruption of man's fallen nature, but of which symbolic glimpses may still be gained, in the beautiful sights and sounds of Nature and in the appearances of angels. The songs, in their spirit of simple faith and piety, resemble Watts' *Songs for Children*, but to this there is added a charmingly decorative border of mystical fancy, essentially Swedenborgian in its origin. The keynote of feeling is struck in stanzas such as:

> Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
> Is God our Father dear,
> And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
> Is Man His child and care—[1]

a doctrine which is applied in the song *On Another's Sorrow*:

> And can He, who smiles on all,
> Hear the wren with sorrows small,
> Hear the small bird's grief and care,
> Hear the woes that infants bear—
>
> And not sit beside the nest,
> Pouring pity in their breast,
> And not sit the cradle near,
> Weeping tear on infant tear?
>
> And not sit both night and day,
> Wiping all our tears away?
> Oh no! never can it be!
> Never, never can it be!
>
> He doth give His joy to all;
> He becomes an infant small;
> He becomes a man of woe,
> He doth feel the sorrow too.
>
> Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
> And thy Maker is not by:
> Think not thou canst weep a tear,
> And thy Maker is not near.
>
> O He gives to us His joy,
> That our grief He may destroy:
> Till our grief is fled and gone
> He doth sit by us and moan.[2]

[1] *Poems of William Blake* (Yeats), p. 55. [2] *Ibid.* p. 61.

Allowing for a certain eccentricity of expression, there is nothing in such thoughts alien to the universal Christian Faith. But as time advanced, Blake, like all mystics, became convinced of the infallibility of his own inspiration, and correspondingly dissatisfied with the teaching of his old master. In his *Prophetic Book* called *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he writes thus of Swedenborg:

> I have always found that angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning.
>
> Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new; though it is only the contents or index of already published books.
>
> A man carried a monkey about for a show, and because he was a little wiser than the monkey grew vain, and conceived himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg: he shows the folly of churches and exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious, and himself the only one on earth that ever broke a net.
>
> Now hear a plain fact. Swedenborg has not written any new truth. Now hear another: he has written all the old falsehoods.
>
> And now hear the reason: he conversed with angels who are all religious, and conversed not with devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable through his conceited notions.
>
> Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further.
>
> Hear now another plain fact: any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante and Shakespeare an infinite number.[1]

It is characteristic of Blake never to have recognised that what he wrote about Swedenborg was applicable to himself. It would be waste of time to attempt to track minutely the subtleties of his thought, and unphilosophical to regard (with some of his editors) his vagaries of fancy as revelations supernaturally conveying hidden truths.[2] But in order to measure the value of his art, it should be remembered that his compositions are grounded on certain fixed beliefs, the principal of which are—that the

[1] Yeats, *Poems of William Blake*, p. 167. [2] *Ibid.* p. xxxix.

traditional interpretation of the Bible is a delusion and a snare;[1] that all scientific reasoning, including the philosophy of Newton, founded on the observation of sensible things, is deceptive,[2] since the world of matter is chaotic and unreal; and that the only perceptions to be trusted are the intuitions of the artist, whether poet, painter, or musician.[3] As his indignation with the accepted creeds of society increased, he pushed on always farther from his mystical starting-point until his own philosophy became a Pantheistic jumble, made up of fancies borrowed from the early Gnostics or the Cabbala, together with ideas of Christian mystics from the time of Tauler, and the transcendental magic of Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa, the whole producing a result hardly distinguishable from Devil-worship. The general bent of his speculations is the subversion of all intellectual "authority"; and the typical monument of his inspiration in this department is a poem called significantly *The Everlasting Gospel*, certain phrases of which have so shocked some of his more matter-of-fact editors, that they have amended his text in such a way as to destroy its obvious intention.[4]

Turning from the technical characteristics in the lyrical poems of Burns and Blake to the social spirit of which they are the reflection, it is evident that the verse of both is the index, and to a great extent the product, of volcanic forces, shaking the foundations of European order. Both were moved by the genius of the French Revolution: the former, in his last days, associated with agitators who defended the worst excesses of the French anarchists: the latter was the friend and champion of Tom Paine. In Burns, however, the revolutionary spirit was unconsciously controlled by the instinct of patriotism: a peasant, with an ardent love of his native soil, his imagination mounted on the democratic wave, because he seemed thus to gain enlarged views of life and liberty for himself, his class, and the whole Scottish nation. As he says of his poetry:

[1] See p. 77.
[2] *Poems of William Blake*, p. 108.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 202.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 242.

The hero of these artless strains
A lowly Bard was he,
Who sung his rhymes in Coila's plains
With meikle mirth and glee:
Kind Nature's care had given him share
Large of the flaming current,
And, all devout, he never sought
To stem the sacred torrent.

The words and rhythms in which he sought to express his imaginative impulses were essentially national, and derived their volume from past generations which had mingled their blood and thought in the history of their country. No doubt the same impulses carried him at times into invectives against the distinctions and privileges of rank, as in the well-known lines:

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, and stares, an' a' that?
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a cuif for a' that.
For a' that an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that,
The man o' independent mind,
He looks an' laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak' a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that!
But an honest man's aboon his might:
Guid faith, he mauna fa' that.
For a' that an' a' that,
Their dignities an' a' that,
The pith o' sense an' pride o' worth
Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may
(As come it will for a' that),
That Sense and Worth o'er all the earth
Shall bear the gree an' a' that!
For a' that an' a' that,
It's comin' yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that.

Lines like these, inspired by a fresh and genuine sentiment, but staled by mechanical repetition on party platforms, have come to breathe a suspicion of clap-trap; and the

strain of cheap rhetoric recurs in a much more offensive form in Burns's *Tree of Liberty*, if indeed (which seems doubtful) he is responsible for that poor rant. But in general the working of the spirit of Liberty in Burns shows itself in a spontaneity and naturalness of feeling, which—whether he is giving utterance to his sentimental Jacobitism, as in *Charlie is my darling*, and *O'er the water to Charlie*, or to his thirst for national independence, as in *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, or to his dislike of Kirk discipline, as in *The Epistle to William Simpson*—always seems to reflect in the right form of the vernacular the refined patriotism of a free peasantry.

In Blake, on the contrary, the atmosphere of the French Revolution developed an extravagance of imagination, which often drove his poetical genius, in its craving for Liberty, into the realms of chaos. It seems unquestionable that truly great art, as it implies a community of feeling between the artist and those to whom his art is addressed, must require a certain foundation and framework of convention. What is true of art in general is especially true of poetry, since this, the most social of the arts, finds its instrument in language ; and words, being the conventional symbols by means of which men communicate their ideas, are not fitted to express the merely exceptional experience of the individual. Blake's *Prophetic Books*, and many of his lyrics, often remind us of Horace's genial lines on the mad gentleman of Argos, who derived enjoyment from sitting in the empty theatre under the belief that he was witnessing fine tragedies on the stage.[1] But Horace's monomaniac

[1] Horace, *Epist.* ii. 2. 128-140.

Fuit haud ignobilis Argis
qui se credebat miros audire tragoedos
in vacuo laetus sessor plausorque theatro.
cetera qui vitae servaret munia recto
more, bonus sane vicinus, amabilis hospes,
comis in uxorem, posset qui ignoscere servis,
et signo laeso non insanire lagenae ;
posset qui rupem et puteum vitare patentem.
hic ubi, cognatorum opibus curisque refectus,
expulit elleboro morbum bilemque meraco,
et redit ad sese "pol! me occidistis, amici,
non servastis" ait "cui sic extorta voluptas
et demtus per vim mentis gratissimus error."

did not go so far as to insist on representing what he saw himself to a non-existent audience; whereas all Blake's work breathes contempt for and indignation with the world for not seeing things in the light of his own visions. His art lacks the element of judgment.

Theology of every kind of course involves an element of mysticism, but before this can be used for the purposes of art, it must be organised by reason. Dante's *Paradiso* is, like Blake's poetry, based upon symbolism; but Dante's meaning can always be discovered by reference to the accepted scholastic theology of his age. Blake the poet, on the contrary, is never careful to keep in touch with his reader, and his art suffers in consequence. So long as his mysticism does not prevent him from tracing the firm outlines of some mental image, no reader need be persistent in asking the meaning of his beautiful pictures in words. Here, for example, is a little poem in which the indefiniteness of the story adds a charm to the clearness of the separate images:

*The Little Girl Lost*

In futurity
I prophesy
That the earth from sleep
(Grave the sentence deep)

Shall arise and seek
For her master meek,
And the desert wild
Become a goddess mild.

In the Southern clime,
Where the summer's prime
Never fades away,
Lovely Lyca lay.

Seven summers old
Lovely Lyca told.
She had wandered long,
Hearing wild birds' song.

"Sweet Sleep come to me
Underneath the tree:
Do father, mother weep?
Where can Lyca sleep?

"Lost in desert wild
Is your little child.
How can Lyca sleep,
If her mother weep?

"If her heart does ache,
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep,
Lyca shall not weep.

"Frowning, frowning night,
O'er the desert bright
Let thy moon arise,
While I close my eyes."

Sleeping Lyca lay,
While the beasts of prey,
Come from caverns deep,
Viewed the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood,
And the virgin viewed;
Then he gambolled round
O'er the hallowed ground.

Leopards, tigers, play
Round her as she lay;
While the lion old
Did bow his mane of gold,

And her bosom lick,
And upon her neck
From his eyes of flame
Ruby tears there came:

While the lioness
Loosed her slender dress;
And naked they conveyed
To caves the sleeping maid.

On the other hand, where—as in the following lines—the poet seems mainly anxious to put into words his own visionary view of the unseen world, the imagery becomes chaotic and the poetry degenerates into doggerel:

I stood in the streams
Of heaven's bright beams
And saw Felpham sweet
Beneath my bright feet,
In soft female charms;
And in her fair arms

My shadow I knew,
And my wife's shadow too,
And my sister and friend.
We like infants descend
In our shadows on earth,
Like a weak mortal birth.
My eyes, more and more,
Like a sea without shore,
Continue expanding,
The heavens commanding,
Till the jewels of light,
Heavenly men, beaming bright,
Appeared as one man,
Who complacent began
My limbs to enfold
In his beams of bright gold;
Like dross purged away
All my mire and my clay.

Throughout the verse of Blake we feel the born painter of genius trying to make poetry do the work of his own art. More often than not he fails, because, for the reason I have already suggested, the necessary conventions of language imprison him within limits embarrassing to the movement of his imagination. It is different when he is expressing himself by means of pictorial forms, for here imagination has more natural liberty, while at the same time the very conditions of his art compel him to restrict himself within intelligible limits. The real greatness of his artistic power is seen when his invention as a painter is employed in the illustration of other men's poetry. A certain conventional base being prescribed for him, the sublimity and congeniality of the subject with which he deals allow full scope for original creation. It will scarcely be disputed that the finest monuments of his genius are his illustrations of Blair's *Grave*, *The Book of Job*, Dante's *Inferno*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In three of these texts his imagination moves in the region created for him by congenial spirits: in the fourth the grand conceptions embodied in his outlined images release the reader's thought from the limits within which it is confined by Blair's commonplace verse.

# CHAPTER V

## THE NEW WHIGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON POETRY AND CRITICISM

*The Edinburgh Review*

Samuel Rogers: Thomas Campbell: Thomas Moore

On the 5th May 1789 the States-General of France, never summoned since 1614, met again at Versailles. The 14th of the following July saw the destruction of the Bastille by the populace of Paris, and the tumultuary movement of the French Revolution increased in vehemence from day to day. The course of events in France soon showed the effects that had been produced on political life in England by the advance of the spirit of Revolutionary Liberty. When tidings of the fall of the Bastille reached England, Fox exclaimed: "How much is it the greatest event that ever happened in the world! And how much the best!" About two years later, during the debate on the Canada Bill, he declared that he regarded the new French Constitution "as a most stupendous and glorious fabric of liberty."[1] Burke, on the contrary, denounced it "as a building composed of untempered mortar—as the work of Goths and Vandals where everything was disjointed and inverted."[2] The memorable rupture between Burke and Fox was the result of this antagonism of political opinion.

It is indeed evident that the cleavage of parties symbolised by it was caused by the deepest divisions of principle, not only political but social, and involving elements of taste, sentiment, and imagination, as well as

[1] Lord Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, vol. ii. p. 46. [2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 95.

practical philosophy. The old English Parties, Whig and Tory alike, had their roots deep in the Monarchical and aristocratic traditions of the national history: the new departure of Fox and his disciples took for its base the abstract principles of Liberty and Equality advocated by the philosophers of the French National Assembly. Burke, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, pleads with impassioned eloquence, not only as an English statesman, but as the champion of the ancient Feudal and Ecclesiastical System of Europe; Fox, as events developed, was forced, involuntarily, to identify himself more and more closely with the cosmopolitan, anti-national tendencies represented by such extra-Parliamentary bodies as the Constitutional Society, the Revolution Society, and the Friends of the People. Inevitably, therefore, a fusion was gradually effected between the remains of the old historic parties, Whig or Tory, while the New Whigs, separated into a special organisation, placed themselves at the head of the party movement, which at last effected the fundamental change in the Constitution involved in the Reform Bill of 1832.

This evolution of political parties in England was accompanied by an almost exactly parallel change of literary taste. In the last volume I described the gradual formation of that court of Public Opinion which after the Revolution of 1688 exercised such influence in determining the standards of artistic imagination.[1] The pioneers of this movement in literature, like their colleagues in politics, were Whigs; and indeed the orderly settlement of the Revolution could not have been effected without close co-operation between Whig men of action and Whig men of letters. I have endeavoured to define the double principle, political and literary, on which Addison and Steele sought to reconcile the conflicting principles in the imagination of their time. True children of the Renaissance, it was their aim to develop the civil element in the constitution of their country, without disturbing those feudal and ecclesiastical institutions

[1] Vol. v. chap. iv.

which seemed to have naturally assimilated with the life of the people. In the expression given to the conceptions of civil order derived from this leading idea they were careful to pursue a mixed method, by taking as the groundwork of their diction the spoken language of polite society and refining it in the crucible of the best literary tradition. A settlement of the first principles of Taste was thus effected, closely resembling the compromise accepted in the political Constitution ; and the new order, as was the case in politics, was constantly modified by the changes of social thought which reflected themselves in the gradual shifting of the standard of literary language. The essence of this aesthetic evolution consisted in the gradual predominance of the literary over the conversational element in the idiom of composition, and its various stages may be best noted by observing the alterations of style adopted from age to age by those engaged in the production of periodical literature.

To what I have said in the last volume of the work of Addison and Steele I need only here add that their task was accomplished mainly by means of *Essays* ; that these were anonymous ; that they were the work of a few leading writers, acting in concert with each other, and that the matter with which they dealt was almost entirely social, to the exclusion of party politics. The guidance of opinion in politics was at first effected for the most part by pamphlets ; but by degrees the Essay was brought into play for the advocacy of party ideas, such as those propagated respectively by *The Freeholder* and *The Englishman*. In the period immediately following the death of Addison, though literature and politics were occasionally blended in Grub Street organs like *Mist's Journal*, the two streams continued to flow apart ; the scheme of the literary essay being developed in *The Plain Dealer*, while *The Craftsman* was conducted as a purely political organ.

In the next decade *The Gentleman's Magazine*, founded by the printer Edmund Cave, combined some of the features of a newspaper with an element of letters, con-

sisting mainly of translations from classical and foreign literature; but it made no attempt to guide opinion in a definite direction, literary or political, except in so far as this was done by the reports of debates in "the Senate of Lilliput," which in reality reflected the sentiments rather of the reporter than of the supposed speakers.

In 1750, however, Johnson began *The Rambler*, a bi-weekly paper, published also by Cave. The intention of this was to direct the public taste on the lines originated by Addison and Steele, that is to say by periodical Essays. The circumstances of the time necessarily gave to the later Essays a complexion essentially different from the style adopted in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. *The Rambler* was almost entirely the work of one man, whose vigorous mind stamped its impress on every line of its discourses about religion, morals, and taste. Where *The Spectator* conversed, *The Rambler* preached; and, naturally, while Addison used as nearly as possible the colloquial language prevailing in good society, Johnson assumed the didactic manner of the pulpit. His Essays—though never as popular as those of his predecessor—being widely read, his Latin vocabulary and the balanced form of his sentences helped to propagate a manner of writing far more easily imitated than the elegant simplicity of *The Spectator*. Addison's principle of composition was in fact inverted by Johnson. The former had said, at the opening of his enterprise, that it was his ambition to translate philosophy into popular language: the latter declared in the last number of *The Rambler*: "When common words were less pleasing to the ear, or less distinct in their signification, I have familiarised the terms of philosophy, by applying them to popular ideas."

When *The Rambler* ceased to appear, its place was taken by *The Adventurer*, a paper founded by John Hawkesworth, a skilful imitator of Johnson's manner. It followed closely the lines marked out by *The Rambler*, and Johnson himself was a frequent contributor to its pages; but as several other writers, notably Bathurst and Joseph Warton, were associated in the enterprise,

the essays contained in it showed a greater variety of matter and style than those of the earlier publication. The chief historical value of *The Adventurer* lies in the clear indication given in it of the tendency, in the more learned class of readers, to separate interest in literature from the active pursuits of life, and, by a necessary consequence, to isolate the diction of prose, which Addison and Swift had been careful to ground on conversation, within more strictly bookish limits. The following passage is highly suggestive :

> Learning has been divested of the peculiarities of a college dress that she might mix in polite assemblies, and be admitted to domestic familiarity, but by this means she has been confounded with ignorance and levity. Those who before could distinguish her only by the singularity of her garb cannot now distinguish her at all : and whenever she asserts the dignity of her character, she has reason to fear that ridicule which is inseparably connected with the remembrance of her dress ; she is therefore in danger of being driven back to the college, where, such is her transformation, she may be at last refused admittance : for instead of learning's having elevated conversation, conversation has degraded learning ; and the barbarous and inaccurate manner in which an extemporary speaker expresses a hasty conception is now contended to be the rule by which an author should write. . . . I am of opinion that with this view Swift wrote his " Polite Conversation " ; and where he has plucked up a weed, the writers who succeed him should endeavour to plant a flower. With this view . . . it is hoped that our fashionable conversation will no longer be the disgrace of rational beings ; and that men of genius and literature will not give the sanction of their example to popular folly, and suffer their evenings to pass in hearing or telling the exploits of a pointer, discussing a method to prevent wines from being pricked, or solving a difficult case in backgammon.[1]

From one point of view these words are a striking testimony to the triumph of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The ideal of politeness, upheld by Addison before the Clubs and Assemblies of London, had penetrated into the country, and was now recognised as a common standard of good-breeding in all parts of English society. But though Addison had insisted on the study of good

[1] *Adventurer*, No. 139.

literature as an essential element of national well-being, his main object in *The Spectator* was the refinement of morals and manners. His endeavours had been successful: a rational Public Opinion was now easily brought to bear everywhere on the conduct of individuals; when, however, society settled down into the new order, its basis was always in process of being dissolved by the forces of intellectual indolence and natural decay. On the other hand, the curiosity of active minds, ever in pursuit of new things, gave constant encouragement to the licence claimed by adventurous writers. Literary judgments in the court of Public Opinion were therefore constructed out of three authorities: the opinion of the learned critics, who were acquainted with the traditional law of Literature, handed down with all its glosses from the times of Aristotle; that of the assertors of unlimited liberty for the individual inventor; and that of the General Reader, a tolerant but somewhat lazy judge, whose common sense was on the whole exerted to discourage absurdities, but who, desiring above all things to be amused, had usually a tenderness for the extravagance of literary or artistic dissent.

A superficial knowledge of the principles of criticism having been widely propagated through society by means of the Essay writers, the next step was to create a court of Professional Critics, who, in anonymous *Reviews* of books, advised the public of things deserving to be read. In 1749 appeared *The Monthly Review*, which described itself as "A Periodical work, giving an account with proper abstracts of, and extracts from, the New Books, pamphlets, etc., as they come out." This Review did not profess to guide opinion as to the merits of the different publications which it analysed, but it was followed in 1756 by *The Critical Review*, which, in the Preface to its first Volume, announced the character of its authors as follows:

> The judicious reader will observe that their aim has been to exhibit a succinct plan of every performance; to point out the most striking beauties and glaring defects; to illustrate their remarks with proper quotations; and to convey these remarks in

such a manner as might best conduce to the entertainment of the public.

As variety is the soul of such entertainments, and the confined nature of their plan would not admit of minute investigation, they have endeavoured to discover and disclose that criterion by which the character of a work may at once be distinguished, without dragging the reader through a tedious, cold, inanimated disquisition, which may be termed a languid paraphrase rather than a spirited criticism.

Both Reviews were exclusively literary, though the writers in them did not disguise their political opinions. Johnson, in his conversation with George III., said that the *Monthly* Reviewers were "enemies of the Church"; but at a dinner at Thrale's, described by Boswell, he allowed that both Reviews did their work impartially:

"The Monthly Reviewers," said he, "are not Deists; but they are Christians with as little Christianity as may be; and are for pulling down all establishments. The Critical Reviewers are for supporting the Constitution both in Church and State. The Critical Reviewers, I believe, often review without reading the books through; but lay hold of a topic, and write chiefly from their own minds. The Monthly Reviewers are duller men, and are glad to read the books through."[1]

To keep clear of the field of politics was easy enough for men of letters in the merely factious conflicts of the first half of George III.'s reign. But as opinion became heated at the outbreak of the French Revolution, the political atmosphere gradually penetrated the minds of the Reviewers, and long-suppressed partisanship began to find expression in their literary judgments. A good example of this is to be found in *The Monthly Review* for April 1793 and following numbers, which, in a criticism of Godwin's *Political Justice*, illustrates at once its adherence to its own declared method of merely analysing the contents of a book, and Johnson's remark about its preference for non-Christian principles:

"It may well be doubted," says the Reviewer, "whether, at any period since the fatal contest between Charles I. and his parliament, the minds of men have been so much awakened to

[1] Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Croker's Edition), p. 504.

political inquiry as they are at this moment. If the well-being of society may be said to depend on the progress of political knowledge, it will follow that nothing is so desirable as the earnest pursuit of this inquiry: and what indeed can so effectually promote the peace and welfare of society as knowledge, etc.? . . . For these reasons we have no small degree of pleasure in announcing the present work to our readers as one which, from the freedom of its inquiry, the grandeur of its views, and the fortitude of its principles, is eminently deserving of attention. . . .

"The farther we proceed in our examination of this bold and original work, the more we are convinced that it is proper, for this particular period, to present our readers with as clear an analysis of its contents as the nature of our publication will allow, rather than to obtrude any decided opinion of our own. The minds of men are at present so agitated, and their principles are unfortunately so opposite, that we think it our *duty* thus to limit ourselves, and to suffer each reader to draw his own conclusions."

Considering that national enthusiasm had been heated "at this period" to boiling-point by Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, such a recommendation of revolutionary principles under the veil of dispassionate "Inquiry" speaks volumes as to the truth of Canning's satire on the "new" Virtues of Philanthropy and Candour. By insensible degrees party spirit permeated the whole body of periodical literature. The uncompromising temper of *The Anti-Jacobin* precluded its Reviewers from making any attempt at literary criticism on abstract principles, and their witty satire has an exclusively ethical basis. But in 1802 a new departure was made. The founders of *The Edinburgh Review* aimed at giving a survey of the whole intellectual state of society, political and literary, judged by a standard of what may be called philosophical Neo-Whiggism. Published in Edinburgh, the *Review* was maintained by the contributions of several clever young men, whose main object was to promote the fortunes of the most advanced section of the New Whigs, and in whose programme literary criticism was included mainly as a means of attracting the general public to study the advocacy of their political cause. At first the Reviewers, in judging of books, preserved the impartial tone praised by Johnson in the old literary periodicals; but after a time

the desire of titillating the public fancy led them into a habit of satirising authors, particularly when these gave any sign of sympathising with the politics of the opposite party.

The Editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, and its most representative critic, was Francis Jeffrey, a Scotch lawyer, who combined in his temper political and literary inclinations, inherited from the Revolution of 1688, with the doctrinaire habit prevalent among the philosophers of the French Revolution. He possessed all the political party spirit and literary smartness of the authors of *The Rolliad*. At the same time his legal training, as well as his editorial experience, showed him the necessity of guiding the public taste in the direction he desired, by adopting some apparently authoritative standard of aesthetic judgment; and the standard which he eventually erected was characterised by the oligarchical exclusiveness of the faction to which he belonged. He so far followed the national tendency to freedom of opinion as to keep his edicts clear of the classical "Rules"; he proclaimed his admiration for the Elizabethan dramatists, and professed only a qualified approval of the style of Dryden and Pope. It would be possible, he thought, for the modern poet to invent a manner of writing which should combine the virtues and avoid the faults of English poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a belief which, as we shall see, was also shared by Coleridge.[1] But he made no attempt to fortify his position by historical reasoning, and in point of fact the critical doctrines of himself and his assistants in *The Edinburgh Review* merely reflected the intuitions of a somewhat narrow common sense. His character as a critic is well estimated by Mr. Saintsbury:

> Jeffrey is no mere English La Harpe, as some think: he does not exemplify the Neo-Classical "Thorough," the rigour of the Rule, after the fashion which makes that remarkable person so interesting. On the contrary, he is only the last and most noteworthy instance of that mainly Neo-Classic inconsistency which we pointed out and on which we dwelt in the last volume.

[1] See pp. 202-3.

Except that he looks backward more than forward, Jeffrey often reminds us rather of Marmontel. He has inherited to the fullest extent the by this time ingrained English belief that canons of criticism which exclude or depreciate Shakespeare and Milton "will never do," as he might have said himself: but he has not merely inherited, he has expanded and supplemented it. He has not the least objection to the new school of students and praisers of those other Elizabethan writers, compared with whom Shakespeare would have seemed to La Harpe almost a regular dramatist, and quite a sane and orderly person. He has a strong admiration for Ford. He will follow a safe fellow-Whig like Campbell in admiring such an extremely anti-"classical" thing as Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida*. He uses about Dryden and Pope language not very different from Mr. Arnold's, and he is quite enthusiastic (though of course with some funny metrical qualms) about Cowper.[1]

The foregoing sketch of the progress of critical opinion in England will enable the reader to perceive how closely analogous were the effects produced by the expansion of Liberty in the distinct spheres of politics and literature. The Old Whigs, the chief authors of the Revolution of 1688, had helped to form a body of constitutional principle and practice, based entirely on English experience, which, in theory at least, was accepted as the gospel of the party up to the eve of the French Revolution. The latter event brought about a rupture, when the cosmopolitan principles of Liberty by which it was inspired were adopted by Fox as a natural development of the Whig doctrine.

Similarly, after the Revolution of 1688, the standard of classical authority had been acknowledged both by Whig and Tory writers as the Supreme Court of Appeal in questions of Taste: Addison had taken its decisions as the basis of his critical Essays in *The Spectator*, and Pope had declared in his *Essay on Criticism*:

> Those Rules of old discovered, not devised,
> Are Nature still, though Nature methodised.

This "Old Whig" doctrine (as it may be called) in literature prevailed through the first half of the eighteenth

[1] *History of Criticism*, vol. iii. pp. 289-90.

century. Afterwards the repressed elements of mediaevalism began again to exert a modifying influence on the public taste, and symptoms of an uprising against the absolute authority of the Classics showed themselves in those various movements of reaction or revival, headed respectively by the Wartons, Bishop Percy, Macpherson, and Chatterton, on which I have already dwelt.[1] By means of this change of opinion the New Whigs of literary criticism, who had their headquarters in *The Edinburgh Review*, were enabled to take up a middle position. They by no means intended to overthrow the Classical standards of literary authority, with which the Whigs from the first had so closely identified themselves. But, sensible alike of the decay of traditional Classicism and of the rising power of the new Romantic influences, they flattered themselves that the dogmatic judgments which they formed by logic out of their own self-consciousness would possess something of the authority of the ancient "Rules."

Acting on these principles, the *Edinburgh* Reviewers came gradually to be regarded as *arbitri elegantiarum*. The prestige of their decisions was heightened by their association with the aristocratic chiefs of the New Whig party. Many of these statesmen had a genuine love of literature for its own sake, and the weakness of their position in Parliament gave them ample leisure for the cultivation of their literary tastes. It was with reluctance that Fox, in the first years of the nineteenth century, left his books and retirement at St. Anne's to re-enter the parliamentary arena. Lord Lansdowne at Bowood, and Lord Moira at Donington Park, discharged with pleasure the duties of enlightened patrons of letters, and, in London, Holland House became a social rallying-point, equally convenient for discussing the newest manœuvre of the Opposition and the merits of the latest experiment in fiction or poetry.

The New Whig taste, formed out of this curious medley of contemporary sentiment, traditional culture, conversation in the *salon*, and criticism in the literary Review, began to

[1] See vol. v. chap. xii.

exhibit its influence on the eve of the French Revolution. Perhaps its earliest monument is to be found in the poetry of the Della Crusca school; but more respectable results were soon produced in the higher sphere of literature; and the various tendencies of the transition from Classic to Romantic mannerism are characteristically reflected in the work of the three poets whose names stand at the head of this chapter. All of them were, in one sense or another, closely associated with the political opinions of the New Whig party. Two of them were men genuinely inspired: the third, whom, as the senior, I shall notice first, though devoid of original power, was so prominent a member of the lettered society of the time, that his poetry has from this circumstance acquired an historical position to which on its own merits it would scarcely be entitled.

Samuel Rogers was born at Newington Green on the 16th July 1763. He was the son of a banker, and belonged by family connection to that hereditary circle of Nonconformists which, as I have said in the biographical notice of Isaac Watts, had long congregated in the neighbourhood of London.[1] On his mother's side he was related to the Nonconformist divines, Philip and Matthew Henry, and his family was on terms of close friendship with Dr. Price, whose writings, the object of Burke's denunciation, carried weight with the Dissenters at the outset of the French Revolution. He was educated in the Nonconformist's favourite school at Newington Green. Though desirous of being ordained as a preacher, he yielded to his father's wish that he should enter the Bank; but in the midst of business he never ceased to cultivate the taste for literature which he had exhibited, as early as his eighteenth year, in an Essay written for *The Gentleman's Magazine*. In 1786 he published a volume of poems, most of which were imitations of the styles of Gray and Goldsmith. This was followed in 1792 by the work with which his name is chiefly associated, *The Pleasures of Memory*. His Muse then remained silent till

[1] Vol. v. p. 329.

the appearance in 1798 of his *Epistle to a Friend.* In 1803 he moved to a house in St. James's Square, ceasing all active work as a banker, and amusing himself for the most part with the collection of objects of art. Hitherto his poetry had followed the orthodox lines of eighteenth century didactic poetry, but in his *Voyage of Columbus*, published in 1812, he adopted a semi-romantic manner of epic narrative; while in *Jacqueline*, a narrative poem which appeared in company with Byron's *Lara* (1814), the influence of Scott's octosyllabic verse is very apparent. *Human Life*, a didactic poem resembling *The Pleasures of Memory*, reverts to the manner of the couplet, with such variations as are noticed by Macaulay in his *Essay on Byron.* This was published in 1819. *Italy*, the first part of which appeared in 1821, is a series of isolated descriptions of Swiss scenery and Italian towns, written in blank verse. As the sale of this volume was slow, Rogers resolved to quicken it by the aid of a sister art, and the illustrations of Turner and Stothard, on which the poet spent £15,000, procured for the book a popularity that recalls the satirical reflection of Pope on Quarles' illustrated Book of Emblems: "Quarles is saved by beauties not his own." The second part of *Italy* did not appear till 1834; it was the last work of the author, who, however, did not die till the 18th of December 1855, in the ninety-third year of his age.

Rogers, though he took no active part in politics, lived mainly in company with the New Whigs, and reflected their opinions. He was on terms of intimate familiarity with Fox, whom he celebrates in his verses *Written in Westminster Abbey, October 10, 1806*—evidently inspired by Tickell's Elegy on Addison—and to whose retreat at St. Anne's he alludes in *Human Life.* He was also a frequent guest at Holland House, where he became acquainted with all the prominent men of letters of the time. His poetry, founded on the classical style of the eighteenth century, but obviously affected by the romantic atmosphere surrounding him, presents an analogy to the inherited political principles of the

Whigs tempered by French cosmopolitan sentiment. The leading qualities in his intellect are taste and refinement. He says of himself in the closing lines of his *Italy*:

> Nature denied him much
> But gave him at his birth what most he values,
> A passionate love for music, sculpture, painting,
> For poetry the language of the gods,
> For all things here, or grand or beautiful,
> A setting sun, a lake among the mountains,
> The light of an ingenuous countenance,
> And what transcends them all, a noble action.

Byron, describing him, says:

> Rogers is silent,—and, it is said, severe. When he does talk he talks well; and on all subjects of taste, his delicacy of expression is as pure as his poetry. If you enter his house—his drawing-room—his library—you of yourself say this is not the dwelling of a common mind. There is not a gem, a coin, a book thrown aside on his chimney-piece, his sofa, his table, which does not bespeak an almost fastidious elegance in the possessor.[1]

Byron admired this fastidiousness, as illustrated in Rogers' poetry. "I called Crabbe and Sam," says he, "the fathers of present poetry; and said that I thought—except them—*all* of '*us youth*' were on a wrong tack."[2] And speaking of *The Pleasures of Memory* he declares: "His elegance is really wonderful—there is no such thing as a vulgar line in his book."[3] He was, in fact, prejudiced in favour of Rogers by his critical appreciation of the old classical school of poetry. The negative "purity" which he found in him was really only insipidity. Rogers' undoubted "taste" was not a quality of sufficient force to revive a class of metrical composition that had lost its vitality. His *Pleasures of Memory* shows a delicate perception of what is characteristic in other men's styles (just as he could appreciate the essential beauty of a gem or a coin), but little capacity for stamping his own life on his conceptions by vigour of thought and feeling. The first and best part of the poem is an echo of *The Deserted Village*; even this, however, is entirely lacking

[1] Diary, November 22, 1813. [2] Letter to Moore, February 2, 1818.
[3] Letter to Moore, September 5, 1813.

in the pathetic touches of nature that give so much character to Goldsmith's original.[1] After about one hundred and fifty lines of personal recollection, Rogers proceeds to reason on his subject generally, and diverges into the manner of Pope:

> Survey the globe, each ruder realm explore;
> From Reason's faintest ray to Newton soar.
> What different spheres to human bliss assigned!
> What slow gradations in the scale of mind!
> Yet mark in each these mystic wonders wrought;
> Oh! mark the sleepless energies of thought.

When, however, we look for illustrations of these "sleepless energies," we are put off with a series of commonplace examples of Memory, strung together after the fashion of Darwin's irrelevant similes in *The Loves of the Plants*.[2] "The adventurous boy," leaving his native village, weeps as he remembers the days of his childhood. "*So*, when the mild Tupia" embarked to explore the wonders of Eastern civilisation

> He breathed his firm yet fond adieu
> Borne from his leafy hut, his carved canoe.

"*So* Scotia's Queen . . . gazed her soul away," as the shores of France receded from her view, while

> Young Ammon, when he sought
> Where Ilium stood and where Pelides fought,
> Sate at the helm himself;

as to which allusion we are bidden in a note to think "with what feelings the scholar of Aristotle must have approached the ground described by Homer in that poem which had been his delight from his childhood, and which records the achievements of him from whom he claimed his descent."

*Human Life* shows the same tendency to compose a poem by making a patchwork of platitudes: it is the production of a tasteful mind, cultivated by much reading,

[1] It is characteristic of the incoherence of Rogers' mode of poetical conception that, after arousing pity by the pathos of his description of the home of his childhood, lying ruined and roofless, he goes on to describe his feelings on seeing in it again the old objects of luxury, *furniture*, *screens*, *clocks*, etc.

[2] See p. 37 and p. 143.

but devoid of inspiration.[1] In his longest poem, *The Voyage of Columbus*, Rogers claims a certain originality of epic construction, by making his narrative "sudden in its transitions and full of historical allusions, leaving much to be imagined by the reader." What the poem really illustrates is the inability of the poet to sustain a long flight of continuous thought: his "historical allusions" are put together piecemeal, and the supernatural machinery, which is intended to give the history epic dignity, is a crude imitation of Tasso's not very successful introduction of daemonic agency in *Gerusalemme Liberata*. *The Voyage of Columbus*, however, possesses interest for the historian, as furnishing evidence of the progress made by the romantic movement in effecting a transition from the old classical models. While the framework of the poem is evidently suggested by Scott's example in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, the fragmentary character of the narrative seems to have furnished Byron with an excuse for the incoherent style of *The Giaour*. In *Italy* the detached character of the various sketches relieves the poet from the necessity of developing a connected plan; on the other hand, the absence from these of any central vigour of imaginative thought makes it difficult to see why metre should have been chosen as the vehicle of expression. If individuality can be found anywhere in Rogers' verse (which is doubtful), it is in his *Epistle to a Friend*, where he follows—though in a more pompous style—the precedent of Pomfret's *Choice*, and appears, in the concluding lines, to be presenting to the reader a portrait of himself:

> If when this roof shall know thy friend no more,
> Some, formed like thee, should once, like thee, explore;
> Invoke the lares of his loved retreat,
> And his lone walks imprint with pilgrim feet;

[1] There is a curious illustration of Rogers' unconscious plagiarism in a note to this poem on the line beginning, "Then is the Age of Admiration," in which he transfers almost *verbatim* from Johnson's *Life* of Pope the following reflection: "Who does not wish that Dante and Dryden could have known the value of the homage that was paid them, and have foreseen the greatness of their young admirers?"

Then, be it said (as, vain of better days,
Some grey domestic prompts the partial praise),
"Unknown he lived, unenvied, not unblest;
Reason his guide, and Happiness his guest.
In the clear mirror of his moral page,
We trace the manners of a purer age.
His soul, with thirst of genuine glory fraught,
Scorned the false lustre of licentious thought.
—One fair asylum from the world he knew,
One chosen seat, that charms with various view!
Who boasts of more (believe the serious strain)
Sighs for a home, and sighs, alas! in vain.
Thro' each he roves, the tenant of a day,
And, with the swallow, wings his life away."

A much larger measure of genius and vitality is found in the poetry of Campbell, who in many of his tastes and associations resembled Rogers. Like him he had politically strong Whig leanings, and like him his conceptions of poetry were firmly based on antecedent eighteenth-century traditions. But in respect of temperament and character there was a wide interval between them; and while Campbell fell short of Rogers in the methodical regularity of his literary composition, he greatly surpassed him in the poetical inspiration which has given his best work an unique place in English literature.

Thomas Campbell was born on the 27th July 1777 in Glasgow, where his father, who was engaged in the Virginia trade, had a house of business. Thomas was the youngest of a large family, which was at the time of his birth in needy circumstances, his father having lost his fortune in consequence of the revolt of the American colonies. In 1785 the boy was sent to the Grammar School in Glasgow. From 1791 to 1796 he studied in the University of the same city, and distinguished himself by his translations from the Greek Classics. His earliest finished verses, "When Jordan hushed his waters still," were the work of 1795. In 1799 appeared *The Pleasures of Hope*, and in the same volume were included *The Wounded Hussar*, *Gilderoy*, *The Harper*, and *Elegy on Love and Madness*. *The Pleasures of Hope* at once secured for the author a position of mark among the poets

of the day, but though he had been for some little time seeking literary employment in Edinburgh, where he had made the acquaintance of Jeffrey, Walter Scott, Brougham, and others, Campbell did not at once pursue his success, but travelled for some time, rather aimlessly, in Germany. He was at Altona when the Battle of Hohenlinden was fought on the 3rd of December 1800, and in Germany were written *Ye Mariners of England*, published in *The Morning Chronicle* of March 1801, and the *Lines on Leaving a Scene in Bavaria*, which have a touch of the romantic introspection and love of solitude that Rousseau's writings had made fashionable. Recalled to Scotland in the same year by the death of his father, he engaged himself from 1801 to 1803 in different kinds of hack-work. On the 10th of September in the latter year he married his cousin, Matilda Sinclair, and soon afterwards published a new edition of *The Pleasures of Hope*, including in the same volume *Lines Written on Visiting a Scene in Argyleshire*, *Ode to Winter*, *The Beech Tree's Petition*, *The Soldier's Dream*, *Stanzas to Painting*, *The Exile of Erin*, *Lochiel*, and *Hohenlinden*. To Walter Scott in 1805 he sent on the 27th March the first draft of *The Battle of the Baltic*, calling it *The Battle of Copenhagen*; in the same year he undertook for the booksellers his *Specimens of English Poetry*; these, however, were not published till 1818. He was at this time in considerable financial difficulty, from which he was only partially relieved by the grant of a pension of £200 from Fox's Ministry. *Gertrude of Wyoming*, planned in 1807, was published in 1809, together with *Ye Mariners of England*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, and *O'Connor's Child*. Fastidious and indolent, Campbell, after the appearance of this volume, produced little more poetry; the most important of his later verse-compositions being *Lines on a Rainbow* (1819), *Song of Roland* (1820), *The Last Man* (1823), *Theodric*, *Ritter Bann*, *Reullura*, and *A Dream* (1824). Another reprint of his poems with a few additions, consisting mainly of verses connected with the Polish insurrection of 1830-31, was issued

in 1836; and his last work, *The Pilgrim of Glencoe*, appeared in 1842.

His reputation with the public always remained high. From his home in Sydenham, where he settled in 1804, he mixed freely with the literary society of the day, and came frequently as a welcome guest to Holland House. His Lectures on Poetry, delivered in 1812 at the Royal Institution, were very successful. He took a leading part in the founding of London University, and, in 1826, received what he considered the crowning honour of his life, in being elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University, a tribute to his fame by his countrymen which was twice repeated. In his latter years his health gave way: he retired to Boulogne, and died there on the 15th June 1844. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

The expansion of imaginative taste at the opening of the nineteenth century is vividly reflected in the character of Campbell's poetry. He himself was by instinct and conviction a literary Conservative. Byron, noting this tendency in his poetry, ranks him in his "triangular *Gradus ad Parnassum*," [1] on the same plane with Moore—both of them being placed below Rogers, and all three below Walter Scott, but above Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Campbell, in his *Essay on English Poetry*, undertook the defence of Pope against Bowles; nevertheless he was far from attempting a servile reproduction of the style of the poet whom he acknowledged as his master, and for this "liberalism" he is blamed, theoretically, by Byron, who says:

> With regard to poetry in general I am convinced, the more I think of it, that he [Moore] and *all* of us—Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell—are all in the wrong, one as much as another; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself, and from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free.[2]

Two sentiments predominate in Campbell's verse, a fervent love of his native soil, and an enthusiasm for

[1] *Byron's Works* (John Murray, 1898), *Letters and Journals*, vol. ii. p. 344.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. iv. p. 169.

political liberty; and with these is mixed a strong element of religious feeling. His patriotism is as ardent as that of Scott, but it is not associated with the passionate love of wild nature, historic tradition, and romantic adventure, which inspired the author of *Guy Mannering* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* His love of country shows itself rather in a preference for the tender affections and memories of home life. He muses before the ruined home of his ancestors in Argyleshire: Gertrude of Wyoming dreams over the

> Land of my father's love, my mother's birth,
> The home of kindred I have never seen:

the exile of Erin "revisits in dreams" its "sea-beaten shore"; and the soldier, sleeping on a foreign battle-field, tells how—also in dreams—returning

> To the home of my fathers that welcomed me back.
>
> I flew to the pleasant fields, traversed so oft,
> In life's morning march when my bosom was young;
> I heard my own mountain-goats bleating aloft,
> And knew the sweet strain that the corn-reapers sung.

But in the glowing atmosphere of contemporary battle and victory this softness is often exchanged for the lofty lyric march of poems like *The Battle of the Baltic* and *Ye Mariners of England*; while the political Whig traditions of the Campbell clan are expanded into that sympathy with the cause of national independence which, after the first Reform Bill, became one of the features of English Liberalism. The uprising of Poland, celebrated by Campbell in the first of his famous poems, *The Pleasures of Hope* (1798), continued to be sung by him as late as 1831. Inspirations of liberty in Ireland, Germany, Spain, Greece, by turns awoke an answering chord in his imagination. Even in India the commercial misdoings of the English inspired him (doubtless moved by traditional Whig antipathy to Warren Hastings) with a somewhat visionary forecast:

> To pour redress on India's injured realm,
> The oppressor to dethrone, the proud to whelm;

> To chase Destruction from her plundered shore,
> With arts and arms that triumphed once before,
> The tenth Avatar comes! at Heaven's command
> Shall Seriswattee wave her hallowed wand!
> And Camdeo bright, and Ganesa sublime,
> Shall bless with joy their own propitious clime!

The religious note prevailing in his poetry indicates antagonism to the materialist tendencies of Physical Science, a feeling shared by Wordsworth and Keats. It is sounded in *The Rainbow*:—

> When Science from Creation's face
> Enchantment's veil withdraws,
> What lovely visions yield their place
> To cold material laws!—

and is strikingly emphasised both in the fine passage, first inserted in the second edition of *The Pleasures of Hope*, beginning "Oh deep enchanting prelude to repose," and in *The Last Man*, written in 1823.

To a man of genius, imbued with the spirit of classical literature, there was no difficulty in expanding the metrical tradition of the eighteenth century, refined as it had been, in the earlier half of that period, by colloquial usage, so as to make it a fitting vehicle of expression for simple elementary emotions of this kind. Campbell had always an admirable instinct of what was appropriate in poetry. His fastidious taste and judgment make what he says of Parnell generally applicable to himself: "His poetry is like a flower that has been trained and planted by the skill of the gardener, but which preserves in its cultured state the natural fragrance of its wilder air."[1] The careful study of "correct" expression, which marks him for a disciple in the school of Pope, Parnell, and Goldsmith, bore fruit in the considerable number of his lines which have become part of the quotable stock of our national poetry. "'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view": "Like angels' visits, few and far between":[2] "The torrent's smoothness ere it dash below": "Coming events cast their shadows before": "The sentinel stars set

[1] See vol. v. p. 189.
[2] Borrowed, however, from Blair's *Grave*.

their watch in the sky" ; with other phrases of the same kind, are "familiar in our mouths as household words," and bear testimony to Campbell's gift for combining brilliant imagery with epigrammatic diction.

This faculty was not reached by him at a bound. *The Pleasures of Hope*, in the first edition, reads like the work of a clever schoolboy, seeking to imitate the elegant sentimentalism of Rogers and the sonorous pomp of Darwin. The following is a characteristic specimen of its thought and language:

> Hark! the wild maniac sings, to chide the gale,
> That wafts so slow her lover's distant sail;
> She, sad spectatress, on the wintry shore,
> Watched the rude surge his shroudless corse that bore,
> Knew the pale form, and, shrieking in amaze,
> Clasped her cold hands, and fixed her maddening gaze:
> Poor widowed wretch! 'twas there she wept in vain,
> Till memory fled her agonising brain;
> But Mercy gave, to charm the sense of woe,
> Ideal peace, that truth could ne'er bestow;
> Warm on her heart the joys of Fancy beam,
> And aimless Hope delights her darkest dream.

To rank the delusions of madness among the conscious *Pleasures of Hope* shows a feebleness of thought which is unfortunately apparent in Campbell's other illustrations of his theme. Nor, though two of the often-quoted lines mentioned above occur in *The Pleasures of Hope*, can the style of this youthful poem compare for a moment, in point of correct expression, with the pregnant art of Pope, when writing up to his true level, or with the chaste simplicity of Goldsmith. Campbell is often satisfied with the selection of words, which fail clearly to express his meaning, and leave the thought vague and obscure, *e.g.*:

> And mark the wretch whose wanderings never knew
> The world's regard, that soothes though half-untrue,
> Whose erring heart the lash of sorrow bore,
> But found not pity when it erred no more—

or which altogether misrepresent it, as:

> Yes! there are hearts, prophetic HOPE may trust,
> That slumber yet in *uncreated* dust;

(where he means, not that the dust is uncreated, but that there are hearts not yet created out of dust) and :

> Chide not his peace, proud Reason ! nor destroy
> The shadowy forms of uncreated joy,

(where "uncreated" is used for "unsubstantial")

> That *urge* the lingering tide of life, and pour
> Spontaneous slumber on his midnight hour ;

(where "urge" is apparently only used because "quicken" would not suit the metre).

On the other hand, in the later editions of the poem we find the following admirable passage on the destructive tendencies of Science, which, in its strength and lucidity, is worthy to rank with Dryden's translation from Lucretius :

> Are these the pompous tidings ye proclaim,
> Lights of the world and demi-gods of Fame ?
> Is this your triumph—this your proud applause,
> Children of Truth, and champions of her cause ?
> For this hath Science searched on weary wing,
> By shore and sea, each mute and living thing ?
> Launched with Iberia's pilot from the steep,
> To worlds unknown, and isles beyond the deep ?
> Or round the cope her living chariot driven,
> And wheeled in triumph through the signs of Heaven ?
> Oh ! star-eyed Science, hast thou wandered there,
> To waft us home the message of despair ?
> Then bind the palm, thy sage's brow to suit,
> Of blasted leaf and death-distilling fruit !
> Ah me ! the laurelled wreath that Murder rears,
> Blood-nursed, and watered by the widow's tears,
> Seems not so foul, so tainted, and so dread,
> As waves the night-shade round the sceptic's head.
> What is the bigot's torch, the tyrant's chain ?
> I smile on death, if heavenward HOPE remain !
> But if the warring winds of Nature's strife
> Be all the faithless charter of my life,
> If Chance awaked, inexorable power,
> This frail and feverish being of an hour,
> Doomed o'er the world's precarious scene to sweep,
> Swift as the tempest travels on the deep,
> To know Delight but by her parting smile,
> And toil, and wish, and weep, a little while ;

Then melt, ye elements, that formed in vain
This troubled pulse and visionary brain !
Fade, ye wild flowers, memorials of my doom,
And sink, ye stars, that light me to the tomb !
Truth, ever lovely,—since the world began
The foe of tyrants, and the friend of man,—
How can thy words from balmy slumber start
Reposing Virtue, pillowed on the heart !
Yet, if thy voice the note of thunder rolled,
And that were true which Nature never told,
Let Wisdom smile not on her conquered field ;
No rapture dawns, no treasure is revealed !
Oh ! let her read, nor loudly, nor elate,
The doom that bars us from a better fate ;
But sad as angels for the good man's sin,
Weep to record, and blush to give it in !

*The Pleasures of Hope*, in its frequent use of Abstraction and Personification, exhibits all the features of the didactic poetry of the eighteenth century ; but in his later poems, notably *Ye Mariners of England*, *Hohenlinden*, and *The Battle of the Baltic*, Campbell discards these mannerisms and develops a style of his own that reflects the best and purest social idiom of the age. It would be hard to find any short poem in the English language that contains so many elements of the sublime as *Hohenlinden*. In eight stanzas the poet, by a series of master-strokes, has called up a living picture of conflict between two vast armies. It is a typical description of the soldiers' battles of the early French Revolution, in which individual leadership disappears amidst the rush of national passions, and the successive acts of the bloody drama are indicated by images rather of the changing aspects of Nature than of the deliberate purposes of Man. The grand view in the opening stanza of the tranquil snow-clad waste traversed by the dark and rapid river ; the sudden burst of the drum-beat on the stillness of the night ; the muster of the horsemen, " by torch and trumpet fast arrayed " ; the thunder of heaven mingling in the dark with the roar of the artillery ; the gradual change of the prevailing hue in the landscape from snow-white to blood-red ; the confused shouts of the combatants shrouded " in their sulphurous

canopy," impenetrable to the rays of the rising sun ; the fiery exhortation to the chivalry of Munich for a supreme effort ; and at last the solemn silence of the field of conflict strown with the bodies of the dead ;—all these details, presented in words of which the picturesque colour is intensified by the swiftness of the metrical motion, combine to form a poetical battle-piece unequalled in the literature of the world.

Scarcely less skill in the selection and combination of metrical words is shown in *The Battle of the Baltic*, a composition in which patriotic emotion lifts the imagination of poet and reader into a still loftier atmosphere. Fine judgment, a quality in Campbell no less conspicuous than poetic impulse, is shown in the changes made in the structure of this poem. As at first written it consisted of twenty-seven stanzas, of which the following is a sample :

Of Nelson and the North
Sing the day,
When, their haughty powers to vex,
He engaged the Danish decks,
And with twenty floating wrecks
Crowned the fray.

When his poem was completed, Campbell perceived that, while it contained many fine lines, it was defective alike in the unbalanced form of the stanza and in its multiplicity of prosaic and superfluous details. He accordingly retrenched his imagery, while he amplified his metrical architecture, by prefixing four alternately rhyming lines to the two first lines of the stanza, as originally built, and running these two together in the fifth. The words printed in italics in the following transcript of the poem, as it now stands, show how much of it has been introduced from the original draft :

I

*Of Nelson and the North*,
*Sing the* glorious day's renown,
When to battle fierce came forth
All the might of Denmark's crown,

And her *arms* along the deep *proudly shone,—*
*By each gun the lighted brand,*
*In a bold determined hand,*
*And the Prince of all the land*
*Led them on.*

II

*Like leviathans afloat,*[1]
Lay their bulwarks on *the brine*;
While the sign of battle flew
On the lofty British line:
*It was ten of* April[2] *morn by the chime:*
*As they drifted on their path,*
*There was silence deep as death;*
*And the boldest held his breath*
*For a time.*

III

But the might of England flushed
To anticipate the scene;
And her van the fleeter rushed
O'er the deadly space between.
"Hearts of oak!"[3] our captains cried; when *each gun*
*From its adamantine lips*
*Spread a death-shade round the ships,*
*Like* the *hurricane eclipse*
*Of the sun.*

IV

Again! again! again!
And the havoc did not slack,
Till a feeble cheer the Dane
To our cheering sent us back:
*Their shots* along the deep *slowly boom;*
Then *ceased—and all is wail,*
*As they strike the shattered sail,*
*Or, in conflagration pale,*
*Light the gloom.*

---

[1] This line was transferred bodily from the fifth stanza of the original draft. It will be observed that it does not rhyme with the third line of the above version. Campbell doubtless meant to write "Like leviathans in view," but forgot to make the alteration.

[2] In the original "Thursday."

[3] In the original "bands of music" are made to play "Hearts of Oak" at the close of the battle.

V

Out spoke the victor then,
As he hailed them o'er the wave;
"Ye are brothers! ye are men!
And we conquer but to save;
So *peace instead of death let us bring:*
But *yield*, proud foe, thy *fleet*,
*With the crews, at England's feet,*
*And make submission meet*
*To our King.*"

VI

Then *Denmark blessed our chief*,
*That he gave her wounds* repose,
*And the sounds of joy and grief*
From her people wildly rose,
As *Death withdrew his* shades *from the day;*
While *the sun looked smiling bright*
O'er *a wide and woeful sight*,
*Where the fires of funeral light*
*Died away.*

VII

Now joy, Old England, raise!
For the tidings of thy might,
By the festal cities' blaze,
While the wine-cup shines in light;
And yet, *amidst* that *joy and uproar*
*Let us think of them that sleep*,
*Full many a fathom deep*,
By thy wild and stormy *steep*,[1]
*Elsinore.*

VIII

*Brave hearts! to Britain's* pride
*Once so* faithful and so *true*,
On the deck of fame that died
With the gallant good *Riou*—
*Soft sigh the winds of Heaven o'er* their[2] *grave!*
*While the billow mournful rolls*,
*And the mermaid's song condoles*,
*Singing glory to the souls*
*Of the brave!*

Campbell's lyrics are much the best part of his poetry. He carried on the movement inaugurated by Collins

[1] In the original "All beside thy rocky steep."
[2] In the original "your."

and Gray, the latter of whom he resembles in the skill with which he confines romantic feeling within classic form. But while Gray had to think out his romance in the midst of uncongenial surroundings, and sometimes exhibits in his style a certain stiffness and formality, Campbell imposes form on his romantic matter with an easy freedom that suggests how much of his inspiration was derived from the exciting air of the revolutionary era. The swift movement of his rhythms, and his bold mixture of polysyllabic Latin words with picturesque monosyllables—

> The might of England flushed
> To anticipate the scene—
>
> Again! again! again!
> And the havoc did not slack,
> Till a feeble cheer the Dane
> To our cheering sent us back:
> Their shots along the deep slowly boom;
> Then ceased—and all is wail,
> As they strike the shattered sail,
> Or, in conflagration pale,
> Light the gloom—

are admirable. Other romantic features in his poetry are, doubtless, the product of a tendency in the public taste which had now for almost a generation favoured the revival of the ballad style originated by Percy's *Reliques*. But he may justly claim to have been the first to direct the new movement into popular channels. He anticipated Scott in his choice of Highland subjects of romance (*e.g.* his *Lines Written on Revisiting a Scene in Argyleshire*, *Lochiel*, and *Lord Ullin's Daughter*), Byron and Moore in the rolling anapaestic metres which he made the vehicle for his sentiment (e.g. *The Wounded Hussar* and *The Soldier's Dream*). Though *O'Connor's Child* shows plainly the influence of Scott's style, Campbell's verse is always stamped with a character peculiarly its own, free from the introspective self-portraiture which the Romanticists, who derived their inspiration from Rousseau, were bringing into fashion. While there is, as I have said, a glimpse of such a tendency in *Lines Written on Leaving a*

*Scene in Bavaria*, the reflection and versification of that fine poem are much more akin to Gray's style in his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, than to any autobiographic composition of Wordsworth or Byron.

Campbell had no gift for narrative. *Gertrude of Wyoming* in respect of its representation of action and character is third-rate, and, even in its descriptive passages, the author's preference for classical generalisation is reflected in the conventionality of his landscape. As Byron said of the poem: "It has no more locality in common with Pennsylvania than with Penmanmaur." *Theodric* is an attempt to breathe the spirit of romance into a rather tame story of real life: in *The Pilgrim of Glencoe*, on the other hand, a romantic situation of past times is described in verse modelled on the prosaic realism of Crabbe's *Tales*. Neither experiment is inspired by Campbell's natural genius: both are equally unsuccessful.

If Campbell had something in common with Rogers, he had more with the third poet named at the head of this chapter. Both had the same political sympathies, and sought to extend the Whig principle of Liberty beyond the limits of the English Constitution, so as to apply it to all communities struggling for any kind of national independence. Both were widely read in Greek and Latin literature, and in their own verse employed a direct and lucid form of diction, based immediately on the conversational usages of refined society. But the great diversity of their several temperaments produced a marked opposition in their styles. The Scottish poet, fastidious, reserved, diffident, was always inclined to check the exuberance of his poetical impulse by a severe standard of self-criticism: the Irishman, ardent, vain, and expansive, reflected every shade of opinion and sentiment in the brilliant society which admitted him to intimacy, without attempting to consider how far the tastes which he gratified were consistent with the enduring requirements of art.

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray, 1901), *Letters and Journals*, v. 166.

Thomas Moore, the son of Garret Moore, a grocer of Dublin, was born in that city on the 28th May 1779. He was sent at an early age to the Grammar School, Dublin, under Thomas Whyte, and in 1794 was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself by his classical attainments, and took a leading part in the counsels of the conspirators of 1798, though he dexterously avoided compromising himself to the same extent as his friend Robert Emmet. While at Trinity College he completed his translation of Anacreon, and, in 1799, having taken it over with him to London (whither he had gone to enrol himself as a member of the Middle Temple), dedicated it by permission to the Prince of Wales. Already known by the sweetness of his singing, he found no difficulty, under the patronage of Lord Moira, in obtaining entrance to the leading Whig coteries, and the popularity of his translation of Anacreon prepared the way for the publication, in 1801, of his *Poems, By the late Thomas Little.* A frequent guest at Lord Moira's seat, Donington Park, he obtained through his influence an appointment as Registrar of Bermuda in 1803. Thither he went in 1804, but, being soon tired of West Indian society, he returned to England in the same year, leaving a deputy to perform his duties. In 1806 he published his *Odes and Epistles*, which, being severely criticised by Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*, occasioned the ineffective duel satirised by Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.* The publication of *Irish Melodies* was begun in 1807, and was continued at intervals up to 1834, the airs being arranged by Sir John Stevenson, and the words written by Moore. *Corruption* and *Intolerance* were published in 1808, and were followed in 1809 by *The Sceptic; A Philosophical Satire.* When the Whig Ministry was formed in 1806, Moore expected to obtain some valuable appointment; but that Government fell before anything could be arranged, and his political hopes were finally extinguished in 1812, when his chief patron, Lord Moira, hitherto the Prince Regent's favourite adviser, was sent to India as Governor-General,

leaving the Whig party still out of place. Moore, brought by his personal disappointment into still closer sympathy with the Whigs, wrote in 1813 his *Twopenny Post-Bag*, a satire reflecting on the manners of the Prince Regent and his circle. Meantime he had, in 1811, married an actress called Bessie Dykes, with whom he settled down to a domestic life, first—in order to be near Lord Moira—at Kegworth, Leicestershire, afterwards at a cottage near Ashbourne, and later still (1817) in Sloperton Cottage, Wiltshire, where he was in the same neighbourhood as Lord Lansdowne at Bowood. He now turned his attention exclusively to literature, and formed close connections with the leading writers of the day. His intimacy with Byron began in 1811; and in 1817 he visited Paris in company with Rogers. In the following year he published *The Fudge Family in Paris.*

As it was now of importance to him to maintain his family by his pen, he made an agreement with the Longmans, whereby he was to receive £3000 for any poem as long as *Rokeby*, with which he might supply the firm. The result of this undertaking was *Lalla Rookh.* The bargain was made at a fortunate time, for in 1817 his deputy in Bermuda defaulted, and he became responsible for the payment of £4000. Lord Lansdowne offered to advance him the money; Moore, however, with the honourable feeling of independence that always distinguished him, resolved, as far as he could, to discharge his obligations by his own exertions. The debt was paid off, with some aid from Lord Lansdowne, in 1822, but from 1819 till that year he was forced to live in Paris in order to avoid arrest. During his residence there he wrote many social and political squibs of the light kind that had proved so popular in *The Twopenny Post-Bag.* In 1822 appeared *The Loves of the Angels*, which provoked a natural comparison with Byron's almost contemporary *Heaven and Earth.*

In 1820 Moore had received from Byron the gift of his *Memoirs* for publication after his death. Being then involved in pecuniary difficulty he agreed with John

Murray to become the editor of the MS., and, if he survived, to write the *Life of Lord Byron*. In return he was to receive 2000 guineas, part of which sum he was paid in advance: in the event of the money not being repaid at Byron's death, the *Memoirs* were to remain at Murray's absolute disposal. When the news of Byron's death was authenticated, many of those who had read the MS. advised Moore that it ought not to be published: accordingly, as the result of a conference held in Murray's drawing-room on the 17th May 1824, it was resolved that the *Memoirs* should be burned: this was done, and Moore repaid Murray what the latter had advanced him with the interest. In 1828 he entered into a fresh agreement with Murray for a *Life of Byron*, which appeared in 1830.[1] He had already shown his talent for biography in the *Life of Sheridan*, published in 1825; and Byron's *Life* was followed by that of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1831. Of his works of fiction *Captain Rock* appeared in 1824, and *The Epicurean* in 1827. A pension of £300 was awarded him in 1833; and after this date his time seems to have been almost completely taken up with a *History of Ireland*, undertaken for *Lardner's Cyclopædia*, which was left unfinished when his health broke down in 1845. Always a man of strong domestic affections, the successive loss of all his children, the last of whom died in 1845, overwhelmed him; his own death, however, did not take place till the 26th February 1852.

The position of Moore in the Romantic movement of English Poetry at the opening of the nineteenth century offers many points of analogy to that of Gay among the Classic wits of the Georgian era.[2] While devoid of the strongly marked original genius distinguishing men like Byron, Wordsworth, and Campbell, Moore possessed an abundance of literary tact and accomplishment that enabled him to become in a sense the most popular poet

[1] A full account of these transactions may be found in the *Memoir of John Murray* (Smiles), vol. i. chap. xvii., and vol. ii. chap. xxx.

[2] See Vol. v. pp. 142-3.

of his day. The petted darling of the Whig Opposition, he showed, like the author of *The Beggar's Opera*, a wonderful intuition as to the kind of intellectual fare which was suited to the fashionable demand of the moment, and an equal amount of skill in providing it. His subordinate relation to Byron resembles the intimacy between Gay and Pope. But his conduct was marked by a manly independence which honourably elevates his character above that of the "Hare with many friends."

His poetry from first to last reflects the qualities that manifest themselves in his translation of Anacreon, and the words in which he sums up the genius of that poet may be applied with little alteration to his own:

> If we omit those vices in our estimate which ethnic religion not only connived at but consecrated, we shall say that the disposition of our poet was amiable; his morality was relaxed, but not abandoned; and Virtue with her zone loosened may be an emblem of the character of Anacreon.[1]

His own amatory poems reflected the taste of a society, if more extended, scarcely less emasculate than that which welcomed the effusions of Della Crusca. Jeffrey's invective in *The Edinburgh Review* against his early *Odes and Epistles*, though certainly much more austere than the occasion required, is worth quoting, as showing what occasioned the duel between the poet and the critic.

> It seems to be his [Moore's] aim to impose corruption upon his readers, by concealing it under the mask of refinement; to reconcile them imperceptibly to the most vile and vulgar sensuality by blending its language with that of exalted feeling and tender emotion; and to steal impurity into their hearts, by gently perverting the most simple and generous of their affections. In the execution of this unworthy task he labours with a perseverance at once ludicrous and detestable. He may be seen in every page running round the paltry circle of his seductions with incredible zeal and anxiety, and stimulating his jaded fancy for new images of impurity, with as much melancholy industry as ever outcast of the Muses hunted for epithets or metre.[2]

[1] Introduction to *Odes of Anacreon*.
[2] *Edinburgh Review* for July 1806.

Had Moore developed the good sense which afterwards distinguished him, he would have refrained from publishing these crude and juvenile compositions. He had not yet discovered that the true principle for refining a lyric gift like his own was to associate it intimately with music. In the "Advertisement" to *National Airs, No. 1*, he says very happily:

> A pretty air without words resembles one of those *half* creatures of Plato, which are described as wandering, in search of the remainder of themselves, through the world.

His own poetical genius fell in admirably with this principle:

> "I only know," he says, "that in a strong and inborn feeling for music lies the source of whatever talent I may have shown for poetical composition; and that it was the effort to translate into language the emotions and passions which music appeared to me to express that first led to my writing poetry at all deserving of the name."[1]

We can see how much he gained in the way of refinement, by his union of poetry and music, when we compare any of his early amatory poems with the following charming lines, written to an "Old English Air":

Then fare thee well! my own dear love,
This world has now for us
No greater grief, no pain above
The pain of parting thus, dear love, the pain of parting thus!

Had we but known, since first we met,
Some few short hours of bliss,
We might, in numbering them, forget
The deep deep pain of this, dear love, the deep deep pain of this!

But no, alas! we've never seen
One glimpse of pleasure's ray,
But still there came some cloud between,
And chased it all away, dear love, and chased it all away!

Yet e'en could those sad moments last,
Far dearer to my heart
Were hours of grief, together past,
Than years of mirth apart, dear love, than years of mirth apart!

[1] *Moore's Poetical Works* (1841), Preface to vol. v.

Farewell! our hope was born in fears,
And nursed 'mid vain regrets!
Like winter suns, it rose in tears,
Like them in tears it sets, dear love, like them in tears it sets!

This lyrical practice reached its culminating point in Moore's *Irish Melodies*—compositions which fairly entitle him to be regarded as scarcely less the national poet of Ireland than Burns is of Scotland. Nevertheless, the word "national" must be applied to each in a widely different sense. Burns's lyrics are from every point of view a species of "Volks Lied." With little of Moore's sensibility to music, the power of the Scottish poet's lyrical gift springs out of the nature and force of his emotions, which find a fitting vehicle, as well in the Doric dialect of the words as in the artlessness of the musical air for which the words are written. Moore's melodies, on the contrary, like his language and metre, are skilfully adapted to the atmosphere of the aristocratic drawing-room. It is true that they are based on old Irish airs, but these are refined and sophisticated by Stevenson, the composer, to suit the manner of Haydn;[1] and though the patriotism of the sentiment in the memories of the bygone liberties of Ireland has a certain pathos of its own, its acclimatisation to English Whig traditions is in a high degree artificial. In other respects the Anacreontic vein of the poet reappears in his Hibernian music; and except that "I saw from the beach" (for example) is sung to the air of "Miss Molly," and "Fill the Bumper fair!" to "Bob and Joan," there seems to be no reason why the cosmopolitan feeling in these songs should be supposed to be the indigenous product of the genius of Ireland.

On the other hand, Moore's own Irish temperament is characteristically diffused through the whole of his professedly Oriental poem, *Lalla Rookh*. Choosing his subject deliberately, in view of the unmistakable set of the public taste towards Eastern themes, he worked up his materials with all the literary industry that Southey

[1] See Preface to Professor Stanford's edition of *Irish Melodies*.

had shown in the composition of *Thalaba*, and with an imagination steeped in the local colour of scenery, costume, and manners acquired from books of travel, research, and fiction. But where Southey, with conscientious pedantry, strove to Orientalise the whole spirit of his story, Moore, understanding better the requirements of his readers, merely used his subject as a disguise for the realities of Western sentiment and action. He trod, in fact, in the footsteps of Byron, whose romantic manner, as embodied in *The Corsair*, is plainly the inspiring model both for the diction and the rhythms of *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan*. Moore, of course, made no attempt to follow Byron's practice of self-representation, and contented himself with gratifying the taste for romantic love-adventures widely spread among his fashionable audience. With this he mingled the somewhat theatrical enthusiasm for Irish Liberty which formed part of the cult of the Whig Opposition, and which, blended with his own dislike of Protestant religious intolerance, gives an air of animated allegory to the tale of "The Fire-Worshippers" in *Lalla Rookh*. The allegorical keynote of the poem is further accentuated by the prose framework, containing the account of Lalla Rookh's bridal journey, with the very entertaining criticism of Fadladeen on the style of the poet Feramorz, which is clearly intended for a good-natured satire on the philosophical disquisitions of Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*. Jeffrey, with equal good-humour, recognising his own portrait in that of the Grand Chamberlain, retaliated, in his review of *Lalla Rookh*, with a description of Moore's narrative style—which is certainly not unjust:

> His lights dazzle the eye, his perfumes soothe the smell, his sounds ravish the ear: but then they do so for and from themselves, and at all times and places equally—for the heart has nothing to do with it. . . . Poetry, in his hands, becomes a kind of cosmetic art: it is the poetry of the toilette. His Muse must be as fine as the Lady of Loretto.[1]

The same light superficial feeling pervades Moore's

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, February 1823.

political satires. Two dominant motives inspire him when he is serious, patriotism and religion. As an Irishman he sympathised with the rebellion of 1798, but his sentiment never amounted to a passion, like that of Emmet and others; and when he had once accustomed himself to the fashionable society of London, he showed little desire to return to his native country. While he adhered to the traditional forms of the faith in which he had been educated, he did so on the principles of a sceptic:

> Hail, modest ignorance! thou goal and prize,
> Thou last best knowledge of the humbly wise!
> Hail, sceptic ease! when error's waves are past,
> How sweet to reach thy tranquil port at last,
> And gently rocked in undulating doubt,
> Smile at the sturdy winds which war without![1]

It was easy for him, therefore, to accommodate his political and religious attitude to the views of the New Whigs, who attacked the Government for their alliance with the Absolutist party in Europe, and for their opposition to Catholic Emancipation in Ireland. To the Old Whigs, as the authors of the Test Acts which accompanied the Revolution of 1688, he was naturally hostile, and it was against the Portland section of the party—which in the early years of the nineteenth century was hastening to merge itself in the Tory ranks—that he directed what is probably the only well-known couplet of his early satires:

> But bees, on flowers alighting, cease their hum—
> So, settling upon places, Whigs grow dumb!

In these compositions—one of which is called *Corruption* and the other *Intolerance*—written after the downfall of the Grenville Government, he endeavours to assume the lofty moral air of Pope's political satire. The following invective against Castlereagh, for example, seems intended to cast into a poetical form alike a genuine sentiment of

[1] *The Sceptic.*

his own for the wrongs of Ireland, and the party principles professed by the Foxite Whigs:

> See that smooth Lord, whom nature's plastic pains
> Seemed to have destined for those eastern reigns
> When eunuchs flourished, and when nerveless things
> That men rejected were the chosen of kings.
> Even *he* forsooth (oh, mockery accurst!)
> Dared to assume the patriot's name at first.
> Thus Pitt began, and thus begin his apes;
> Thus devils, when *first* raised, take pleasing shapes—
> But oh, poor Ireland! if revenge be sweet
> For centuries of wrong, for dark deceit
> And withering insult—for the Union thrown
> Into thy bitter cup, when that alone
> Of slavery's draught was wanting—if for this
> Revenge be sweet, thou *hast* that demon's bliss;
> For oh! 'tis more than hell's revenge to see
> That England trusts the men who've ruined thee!
> That in these awful days, when every hour
> Creates some new or blasts some ancient power,
> When proud Napoleon, like the burning shield
> Whose light compelled each wondering foe to yield,
> With baleful lustre blinds the brave and free
> And dazzles Europe into slavery!
> That in this hour, when patriot zeal should guide,
> When Mind should rule, and Fox should *not* have died,
> All that devoted England can oppose
> To enemies made friends, and friends made foes,
> Is the rank refuse, the despised remains
> Of that unpitying power, whose whips and chains
> Made Ireland first, in wild adulterous trance,
> Turn false to England's bed, and whore with France!—
> Those hacked and tainted tools, so foully fit
> To the grand artizan of mischief, P–tt,
> So useless ever but in vile employ,
> So weak to save, so vigorous to destroy!
> Such are the men that guard thy threatened shore,
> Oh, England! sinking England! boast no more!

These spirited and poetical lines seem to have fallen quite flat. The great majority of the nation were on the side of the King, who was the main obstacle to Catholic Emancipation; while the leaders of the Whigs were probably conscious that the invective struck a note of feeling higher than the rancour of fallen placemen. On the other hand, when the Regent in 1812 disappointed

the hopes of the Whigs in the reconstitution of the Ministry, the fury of faction broke into a blaze, and Moore was more fortunate in hitting the taste of the moment with his *jeu d'esprit*, *The Twopenny Post-Bag*. The point of this lies entirely in its personality. As a squib it is much below the level of *The Rolliad*, showing no invention and little wit. The verse is light and amusing, but only those who are either acquainted, or curious to become so, with the *chronique scandaleuse* relating to Carlton House, would care in the present day to verify the point of the various allusions. Moore in his correspondence showed himself amusingly vain of the popularity of his satire, and seized the opportunity of his visit to France with Rogers in 1817 to repeat his success in *The Fudge Family in Paris*, a squib of, perhaps, a more meritorious kind, as it gives a brilliant and dramatic sketch of manners in the French capital after the Restoration of the Bourbons.

Taking him as a whole, Moore may be regarded as the most complete representative in poetry of decadent aristocratic society in England during the age of the French Revolution. Byron, in one of his characteristic bird's-eye views of contemporary taste, writes to Murray from Ravenna:

> I have no patience with the sort of trash you send me out by way of books; except Scott's novels, and three or four other things, I never saw such work or works. Campbell is lecturing, Moore idling, Southey twaddling, Wordsworth drivelling, Coleridge muddling, Joanna Baillie piddling, Bowles quibbling, squabbling, and snivelling. Milman will *do*, if he don't cant too much, nor imitate Southey: the fellow has poesy in him; but he is envious and unhappy, as all the envious are. Still he is among the best of the day. Barry Cornwall will do better by and bye, I dare say, if he don't get spoilt by green tea, and the praises of Pentonville and Paradise Row. The pity of these men is, that they never lived either in *high life*, nor in *solitude*: there is no medium for the knowledge of the *busy* or the *still* world. If admitted into high life for a season, it is merely as *spectators*—they form no part of the Mechanism thereof. Now Moore and I, the one by circumstances, and the other by birth, happened to be free of the corporation, and to

have entered into its pulses and passions, *quarum partes fuimus*. Both of us have learnt by this much which nothing else could have taught us.[1]

This suggests very happily the place of Moore in poetry. He was the patronised pet of fashionable society, "free of the corporation," and the intelligent student of its "Mechanism." He sympathised with its sentimental Della-Cruscanism, its love of gossiping scandal, its pervading air of political intrigue, and he had a happy knack of reproducing these qualities in an appropriate style. His manner is a mean between the classic simplicity of Goldsmith and the romantic attitudinising of Byron. Without attempting, like Campbell, to form his metrical diction on the literature of the past, he was equally removed from Wordsworth's propensity to reduce poetry to the level of philosophical prose: the groundwork of his expression is the conversational idiom of the brilliant circles in which he moved. He never seeks to rise above the taste of his audience, but he shows it off to the best advantage by his literary skill. Free, lucid, natural, but somewhat meretricious, his narrative, like his lyric, verse wants nerve and muscle: it dispels *ennui* by its babbling vivacity, and soothes the ear by the sweetness of its music, but it presents little that the memory desires to retain. His is, in fact, the poetry of the New Whig drawing-room.

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray, 1901), *Letters*, vol. v. pp. 362-63.

# CHAPTER VI

## ANTI-JACOBINISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

### *The Pursuits of Literature*: Canning: Frere: Latin Poetry of *The Anti-Jacobin*

Opposition to the spirit of the French Revolution roused as fierce an enthusiasm in the body of the nation as abstract "liberal" theories evoked in the intellectual minority headed by the New Whigs. The leaders of the two historic parties perceived that their fundamental principles were threatened by it—the Old Whigs, in so far as it attacked the system of aristocratic government established by the Revolution of 1688; the Tories, inasmuch as they saw in the murder of Louis XVI. a desperate assault on all monarchical traditions. Moderate opinion throughout the country had at first been mildly in favour of what seemed to be a movement for the extension of constitutional freedom. Many hoped that the wider ideas of liberty embodied in the sentimental philosophy of Rousseau might find some expression in the political life of their own nation. But when the aggressive tendencies of the Revolutionary government fully revealed themselves, English public opinion was no longer satisfied with the policy of non-intervention hitherto steadily pursued by Pitt. Men perceived that their own national liberties were in danger. The house of Ucalegon was on fire, and the first necessity of his neighbours was to prevent the flames from spreading. Postponing their desire for Reform, Englishmen for the most part ranged themselves, in defence of the existing order of society, behind their natural leaders, who showed a corresponding spirit in

advancing against the national foe. The aristocracy shook off their dilettante tastes, and took up in the public cause the literary weapons of wit, satire, rhetoric, and philosophy, too long used mainly for the purposes of faction. The great arsenal to which they resorted for ammunition in this Anti-Jacobin movement was, of course, Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

Beyond any man of his time Burke was qualified to give an illuminating exposition of the principles at stake. His life had been spent in the service of the State, where he had acquired a profound knowledge of men and affairs. To the comprehensive view of the philosopher he added the glowing imagination of the orator and the poet. Above all, he was inspired by a passionate love of the English Constitution, which, as viewed on its historic side since the Revolution of 1688, seemed to him identical with aristocratic supremacy ; and as the principle of aristocracy was the one mainly threatened by the French Revolution, it was in the defence of this point that he concentrated all the energies of his eloquence. His method of reasoning offers a striking contrast to that of the other great philosopher whom the course of events brought at last as a champion into the Anti-Jacobin camp. The arguments of Coleridge have always an air of paradoxical singularity. Whether he is advocating the cause of Revolution, as in *The Watchman*, or maintaining the opposite side, as in *The Friend*, his reasoning equally starts from some metaphysical and absolute base, and presents the principles of his party in a light derived entirely from his own mind. From Burke's political philosophy metaphysics are altogether excluded. The existence of things is with him the only needful axiom, and his chief arguments are derived from antiquity and experience. He relies on the common sense of his audience.

"On these ideas," he says, "instead of quarrelling with establishments, as some do, who have made a philosophy and a religion of their hostility to such institutions, we cleave closely to them. We are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established

democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater. I will show you presently how much of each we possess."[1]

Thus outlined, Burke's argument is European in its scope: the "establishments" specified had been vital principles in the life of every nation forming part of the Christian Republic since its institution by Charlemagne. All these nations, it was justly assumed, were affected by the movement of the French Revolution, but in different degrees, according to the proportions in which the several elements of Church, Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy had mixed themselves in the life of each community. The *Reflections on the French Revolution* was professedly addressed to a Frenchman; but those parts of it which are particularly devoted to an examination of the political situation in France are too plainly partial and defective. The writer's denunciations were directed exclusively against the French National Assembly, as if it were nothing but a body of political intriguers, bent on overthrowing the time-honoured framework of a well-ordered State, and substituting for it their own crude theories of government. He dwelt but slightly on the social evils that had undermined the ancient constitution of Feudalism in France:—the centralisation of all political energy in the Crown; the consequent separation of the nobility from local life; their avoidance of their proper share in the burden of taxation; their absorption of places of profit and power in the Church to the detriment of its spiritual character;—causes which, in combination, had completely destroyed the ancient and chivalrous ideal of the French Monarchy. Burke threw the buckler of his eloquence before the entire feudal fabric of Europe, as it actually existed, because he knew that in his own country the principles of the first great architect, however transmuted, were still preserved; and it was in defence of the Constitution of England that he made his impassioned onslaught on the destructive energies of the Jacobins in France.

[1] Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

Glowing with eloquence, his Treatise appealed immediately to the imagination of the people, and awoke from its torpor the old *political* spirit of English Poetry. The reaction against the dilettantism of the time, already assailed by the *Baviad* and *Mæviad*, became pronounced, and the following lines expressed a general sentiment :

> Speak then, the hour demands : Is Learning fled ?
> Spent all her vigour, all her spirit dead ?
> Have Gallic arms and unrelenting war
> Borne all her trophies from Britannia far ?
> Shall nought but ghosts and trinkets be displayed,
> Since Walpole plied the virtuoso's trade,
> Bade sober truth reversed for fiction pass,
> And mused o'er Gothic toys through Gothic glass ?

The satire from which this passage is taken was published anonymously, and the author's name was for some time strictly concealed, but in the early years of the nineteenth century it became known that it was the work of Thomas James Mathias, son of Vincent Mathias, sub-treasurer to Queen Charlotte and treasurer to Queen Anne's Bounty. He was born in 1754, and from the wording of several of his notes[1] would appear to have been educated at Eton, though, from the entry against his name, when he matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1770, he seems to have come up from some other school. He took his B.A. degree in 1774 and his M.A. in 1777, being elected Fellow of Trinity in 1776. He distinguished himself, while at Cambridge, by his compositions in Latin prose, and took an active part in the tuition of the College, but left the University in 1782 on succeeding his father as sub-treasurer to the Queen. In 1812 he was librarian at Buckingham Palace. Being a fervent admirer of the genius of Gray, he published in 1814 an edition of that poet's works, the cost of producing which was so great, and the price at which it was sold (£7 : 7s.) so prohibitive, that the larger portion of it

[1] *Pursuits of Literature*, Dialogue IV., 200 and note and 600 and note.

remained on his hands, causing him serious pecuniary embarrassment. In consequence partly of these difficulties, partly of failing health, he went to Italy and lived there till his death. In Naples he met Sir Walter Scott during the latter's last illness, and helped to contribute to his "comfort and amusement."[1] A complete master of the Italian language, which he began to learn while at Cambridge, he translated into it some of the great works of English literature, and never ceased to study with enjoyment the poetry of Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto. He died in 1835.

*The Pursuits of Literature* consists of four dialogues, of which the first was published in 1794, the second and third together in 1796, the fourth in 1797. Running through a great number of editions, which continued to be issued almost up to the time of the first Reform Bill, the satire may be taken as a faithful mirror of the dominant literary taste of English Society during the war with revolutionary France. The political purpose with which it was written is declared in the Preface to the Third Dialogue:

> Wherever the freedom of the press exists (and with us may that freedom be perpetual!), I must assert that Literature well or ill conducted is the great engine by which, I am fully persuaded, all civilised states must ultimately be supported or overthrown: . . . I am no enemy to the liberty of discussion and the toleration of opinions; I am for no literary proscription. But I think it is plainly our interest, as well as our duty (while yet we may), to strive to support that Constitution in Church and State which has hitherto been able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance, or rather the pre-eminence, among all those who have been strengthened by policy or sanctified by revelation. What I would contend for also is this; that among all who are worthy to be called scholars or legislators, criticism, observation, and watchfulness, are peculiarly necessary; that men may hear of their common danger, and be admonished to put a few plain questions to themselves: "What are we going to resign or give up, and why? What are we going to adopt, and wherefore?" I repeat it, NOW, in this our day while the bitterness of political death is passing upon almost every other nation in Europe.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. lxxxii.

This, of course, is quite in the spirit of Burke, and Burke is expressly acknowledged as the source of Mathias' inspiration in the following Note:

He is chiefly to be consulted who (if I may be allowed to use the language a little metaphorically) hath stood between the dead and the living and stayed the plague, Edmund Burke; greater and brighter in the decline than in the noon-day of his life and vigour. It would almost be an injury to name the works whereof all Europe rings; but to his countrymen they speak with a force not to be resisted:

> omnes
> admonet, et magna testatur voce per umbras:
> discite iustitiam moniti, et non temnere divos.

As to the plan of the satire Mathias defines it thus:

Much has been observed as to the defect of plan in my Poem. I will say a few words. I wish not to vindicate, but to explain myself. The object of the whole is a view of Literature. The Poem itself is "a conversation on the various subjects of Literature in a very extended sense, as it affects public order, regulated government, and polished society." Nothing is introduced which is not directly or indirectly to that main purpose. It does not appear in the form of an Epistle, a mock epic, or a didactic poem; but as a conversation in which subjects are discussed, as they arise naturally and easily; and the notes illustrate and enforce the general and particular doctrines. There is as much method and connection as is consistent with what I state to be my plan, or design, if you like that word better. There is unity in the design. Conversation has its laws, but they are pleasant, not severe, restraints. . . . I am willing to give my adversaries the full benefit of the sarcastic pleasantry of Lord Shaftesbury, "that it would be a belying of the age, to put so much good sense together in any *one* conversation, as to make it hold out steadily, and with plain coherence, for an hour's time." I never desired to exhaust any subject, but to leave matter for the reader's own suggestion. I may add, that it would be difficult to analyse one of the most finished satires in our language. I mean Pope's two Dialogues, or, as they are strangely called, the Epilogue to the Satires.

It is indeed true that there are many points of resemblance between that masterpiece of Satire, *Seventeen Hundred and Thirty-Eight*, and *The Pursuits of Literature*; and, in spite of Mathias' claim to complete originality, it is

evident that he took the former for his model. Both poems contain a violent assault on the political and social corruption of the age. Both point their general invective with a multitude of personal allusions. In each case a certain unity is given to this multiplicity of detail, not only by the proposed subject, but also by the dominant personal animus of the author. But independently of the vast difference of genius in the two writers, Pope's design possessed one advantage that gave his satire a beauty of form wanting to the work of his disciple: he was the spokesman of an Opposition, whereas Mathias was the defender of a Government. Walpole's methods of parliamentary corruption were concrete evils, in attacking which it was easy to conceal personal rancour behind the splendour of moral declamation: Mathias' discovery of revolutionary tendencies in the multitude of books that he attacked too often seems to be inspired by private jealousy and dislike. The names of the persons assailed by Pope were all well known in the political warfare of the day; he does not shrink from making Royalty itself the object of his moral satire; but the crimes of the large majority of the victims whom Mathias drags forward for public execration could only have been known, even to contemporaries, by the information of his "Notes." The Notes in *The Pursuits of Literature* are for this reason deliberately made part of the Satire, and are defended by the precedent of Pope:

> However excellent, the work of any Satirist is transitory as to its immediate subject. But as it is a view of life designed to be presented to other times, as well as those in which it is written, the necessity of an author's furnishing Notes to his own composition is evident to clear up for himself such difficulties as the lapse of time (and indeed of a very little time) would unavoidably create. This is a privilege and a liberty which was denied to the ancients, which Dryden rejected, and Pope partially adopted.

Pope indeed did so on the advice of Swift; but he took care to give a mock-heroic air to his Notes on *The Dunciad* by feigning them to be the commentary of Martinus Scriblerus. Mathias' Notes, on the contrary, are seriously

didactic ; being, in every case, intended either to elucidate the allusion, expand the moral, or intensify the satire of the text. Many of them have the character of sermons ; and indeed throughout the satire the genuine enthusiasm of the author for the cause in which he is engaged is unmistakable—a quality which procured for him the high commendation of Canning in his *New Morality* :

> Thou too !—the nameless Bard,—whose honest zeal
> For law, for morals, for the public weal,
> Pours down impetuous on thy country's foes
> The stream of verse and many-languaged prose ;
> Thou too !—though oft thy ill-advised dislike
> The guiltless herd with random censure strike,—
> Though quaint allusions vague and undefined,
> Play faintly round the ear, but mock the mind ;—
> Through the mixed mass yet truth and learning shine,
> And manly vigour stamps the nervous line ;
> And patriot warmth the generous rage inspires,
> And wakes and points the desultory fires.[1]

Mathias' satire, in spite of what he himself urges in behalf of its unity, suffers from its want of method. In his hurry of indignation the writer drives furiously, splashing the mud right and left on harmless passers-by, and lashing at whoever comes within his reach on the plea that he is obstructing the public way. Voracious in his reading, he makes an indiscriminate use of his learning, and seldom writes five lines together in his Notes without dragging in a quotation from some Greek, Latin, or Italian author, to emphasise his own moral. All this gives his poem an air of pedantry ; at the same time, from its multitudinous personality, *The Pursuits of Literature* is a monument of great historical value, reviving in detail a period of vanished taste, so that the satirist has grounds for his boast that

> The present Poem was not composed for a trivial purpose, or without mature thought. It is the fruit and study of an independent and disinterested life, passed without the incumbrance of a profession or the embarrassment of business. It was not intended

[1] *Anti-Jacobin* : "New Morality."

merely to raise a smile at folly or conceit; but it was written with indignation against wickedness, against the prostitution of superior talents, and the profane violence of bad men. It was indeed (to use a poet's allusion) poured forth as a libation from the cup of Achilles, consecrated and appropriated.

ουτε τεω σπενδεσκε θεων, οτε μη ΔΙΙ Πατρι.[1]

It is proposed, in its degree, and according to its subject, for the defence of truth, and with an honest wish to uphold society and the best interests of mankind, but chiefly those of our own country. In it there are no imaginary subjects. I have raised no phantoms of absurdity merely to disperse them; but the words, the works, the sentiments of the authors are before us. It might be known hereafter from this poem how we wrote and thought in this age, and not unfrequently how we conducted ourselves.[2]

The vigorous lines concluding the Fourth Dialogue may be cited as a favourable specimen of the author's style:

OCTAVIUS

Here close the strain: and o'er your studious hour
May truth preside and virtue's holiest pow'r!
Still be your knowledge temperate and discreet,
Though not as Jones sublime, as Bryant great,
Prepared to prove, in Senate or the Hall,
That States by learning rise, by learning fall;
Serene not senseless, through the awful storm,
In principle sedate, to shun Reform;
To mark man's intellect, its strength and bound,
Nor deem stability on change to found;
To feel with Mirabeau that "Words are Things,"
While in Delusion's ear their magic rings,
Through States, or armies, in the camp, or street,
And now a School revolts, and now a Fleet.[3]
Go, warn in solemn accents, bold and brief,
The slumbering Minister, or factious Chief;
Mourn proudest empires prostrate in the dust,
Tiaras, fanes, and pontiffs, crown and bust,
And last, as through the smouldering flames you turn,
Snatch the Palladium, though the Temple burn.

Mathias' aims, as the title of his poem suggests, were

[1] Like many other scholars of the day, Mathias never printed Greek with accents.

[2] Preface to the Fourth Dialogue of *The Pursuits of Literature*.

[3] Alluding to the mutiny at the Nore.

purely literary, and his satire could of itself have offered but a faint resistance to the destructive forces against which it was directed. In spite of what he says, Learning is not the cause of the rise and fall of States; and the philosophical enemies of the English Constitution, as it existed, might have vainly threatened its overthrow, if it had not been for the extent of its inward decay, and external circumstances favouring the party of attack. Pulpits, Clubs, and Societies provided centres for the propagation of abstract political theories by individuals who, though few in number, were formidable from their intellectual activity. Several of these fraternities had been founded to promote the interests of one of the great historical parties, and were besides closely connected with religious sects opposed to the connection between Church and State. The Constitutional Society, formed in 1780, had for its object the dissemination of Whig principles, and was largely composed of members of both houses of Parliament. Of the Revolution Society, a body of older standing, Burke says:

> I find upon inquiry, that upon the anniversary of the Revolution in 1688, a club of dissenters, but of what denomination I know not, have long had the custom of hearing a sermon in one of their churches; and that afterwards they spent the day cheerfully, as other clubs do, at the tavern.[1]

The particular annual Sermon before the Revolution Society, which Burke takes as the text of his discourse, was preached on November 4, 1789, by Dr. Richard Price, a Unitarian divine. The Unitarians, as the intellectual descendants of the Deists, had always been opposed to the orthodoxy of the Established Church, and it is worthy of observation that it was in Unitarian chapels that Coleridge preached during his period of Revolutionary fervour. Dr. Price's sermon (afterwards printed with a congratulatory Address from the Revolution Society to the National Assembly of France) was attended by politicians of eminence. With these were joined a large number of men distinguished for science

[1] *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

or letters, Gilbert Wakefield, Horne Tooke, Payne Knight, Godwin, Priestley, and Darwin ; all of whom were active advocates of the French Revolution in its early stage, and, having the entry to anti-Ministerial organs like *The Morning Post* and *The Morning Chronicle*, were able to exercise a powerful influence on public opinion. Neither in Parliament nor the press were the defenders of the Constitution at first a match, in point of ability, for its assailants. The necessity, therefore, of founding some periodical publication, to counteract Revolutionary doctrines and to co-operate with the Tory party in Parliament, was soon perceived, and led to the production of a weekly Review which for wit, argument, and knowledge of the world, stands unrivalled in the history of journalism. *The Anti-Jacobin* was started in 1797, and enjoyed extraordinary popularity during eight months, after which it was brought to a close through the intervention of Pitt, who seems to have feared that its vigour of speech and bold personality might offend the moderate supporters of his Ministry. The Editor was William Gifford, who had proved his qualifications for the post by his *Baviad* and *Mæviad*; but the originator and soul of the enterprise was George Canning, the greatest master of English political satire since the days of Swift and Pope.

The eldest son of George Canning—a descendant of the Cannings of Bristol—and Mary Anne Costello, he was born in 1770. His father, a man of some literary gifts but unsuccessful in business, having lost all his money died of a broken heart in 1771, after which his widow went on the stage and married again, first Redditch, an actor, and secondly Hunn, a linen-draper of Plymouth. George was educated by his uncle Stratford (a banker in London and father of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe), who adopted him as his own son, and sent him to school, first at Hyde Abbey, near Winchester, and afterwards to Eton. Here, with the assistance of John and Robert ("Bobus") Smith, John Hookham Frere, and Charles Ellis, he founded the *Microcosm*, a school magazine of such brilliancy that

Knight, the publisher, gave £50 for the copyright. From Eton he went to Christ Church, Oxford, in October 1788, and in the following year won the Chancellor's prize for Latin verse, the subject being the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Having taken his B.A. degree in 1790, he studied for the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, and took an active part in debating societies, where he distinguished himself by his eloquence. His uncle was a Whig, whose house was a meeting-place for the leaders of the party, among whom Fox and Sheridan distinguished George Canning by their notice, while by Thelwall and other extreme members of the faction he was looked on as their possible leader. His own inclinations, however, led him in an opposite direction, and in 1793 he joined the Tories under Pitt. In 1794 he was elected Member for Newport, and made a successful maiden speech, on the 31st January of that year, in support of a grant for a subsidy to the King of Sardinia. Two years afterwards he was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and became M.P. for Wendover in 1797. Seeing clearly in this official capacity how effectively the Constitutional cause might be promoted by uniting politics with literature, he employed his Etonian connection and the experience he had gained as Editor of the *Microcosm* in developing a plan of literary campaign against the Revolutionary Whigs. The great majority of the contributors to *The Anti-Jacobin* were his school-fellows, and he himself was the author or inspirer of all the most successful *jeux d'esprit* that appeared in the magazine. With its cessation his connection with literature ended; nor is it here necessary to give further biographical details in a career so famous in the political history of this country. He died on the 8th of August 1827.

It may be instructive to consider by what qualities *The Anti-Jacobin*, dealing as it did with subject-matter so perishable as political satire, has secured a permanent place in English Literature. While even *The Rolliad*, with all its humour, can only be rightly understood when read in close and minute connection with the

parliamentary history of its period, the witty sallies of its successor are still as fresh, vigorous, and resonant as on the first day of their publication. The difference in the vitality of the two satires is doubtless due to this, that while *The Rolliad* was employed as a weapon merely in the transitory interests of persons and parties, *The Anti-Jacobin*, no less full of personality than the other, occupied itself with the examination of principles essential to the very existence of society.[1] The times were full of real danger to England, and the authors of *New Morality* could appeal, with more genuine honesty than Pope, in his *Seventeen Hundred and Thirty-Eight*, to the slumbering Muse of Satire:

> Awake! for shame! or e'er thy nobler sense
> Sink in the oblivious pool of indolence!
> Must wit be found alone on falsehood's side,
> Unknown to truth, to virtue unallied?
> Arise! nor scorn thy country's just alarms;
> Wield in her cause thy long-neglected arms:
> Of lofty satire pour the indignant strain,
> Leagued with her friends and ardent to maintain,
> 'Gainst Learning's, Virtue's, Truth's, Religion's foes,
> A kingdom's safety, and the world's repose.

Starting, like the author of *The Pursuits of Literature*, from Burke's position, that ancient institutions were to be defended, as themselves the bulwark of freedom, Canning and his associates directed their satire against their enemies in the arena not only of literature but of politics, and fixed with far more certainty of aim than Mathias on the vulnerable points of their opponents. Mathias had confined himself to moral denunciation of the literary works which seemed to him dangerous to religion and manners; the poetical allies of *The Anti-Jacobin* turned against the same objects the keener weapons of ridicule. Of these the most effective was Parody. The Poetry of the Review opens with Canning's parody of Southey's "Inscription for the Apartment in Chepstow Castle, where Henry Marten, the Regicide, was imprisoned thirty years." The original poem was as follows:

[1] For *The Rolliad*, see vol. v. pp. 238-44.

For thirty years secluded from mankind
Here Marten lingered. Often have these walls
Echoed his footsteps, as with even tread
He paced around his prison; not to him
Did Nature's fair varieties exist;
He never saw the sun's delightful beams,
Save when through yon high bars he poured a sad
And broken splendour. Dost thou ask his crime?
He had REBELLED AGAINST THE KING, AND SAT
IN JUDGMENT ON HIM; for his ardent mind
Shaped goodliest plans of happiness on earth,
And peace, and liberty. Wild dreams! but such
As Plato loved; such as with holy zeal
Our Milton worshipped. Blessed hopes! awhile
From man withheld, even to the latter days
When Christ shall come, and all things be fulfilled.

Canning, addressing the English public, horrified by the recent execution of Louis XVI., argued that, if sympathy was to be asked for regicides, it was equally due to common murderers, on whose behalf good motives may be alleged; and he wrote, in close imitation of Southey's verses, an "Inscription for the Door of the Cell in Newgate, where Mrs. Brownrigg, the Prenti-cide, was confined previous to her execution":

For one long term, or e'er her trial came,
Here Brownrigg lingered. Often have these cells
Echoed her blasphemies, as with shrill voice
She screamed for fresh Geneva. Not to her
Did the blithe fields of Tothill, or thy street,
St. Giles, its fair varieties expand;
Till at the last, in slow-drawn cart, she went
To execution. Dost thou ask her crime?
SHE WHIPPED TWO FEMALE 'PRENTICES TO DEATH,
AND HID THEM IN THE COAL HOLE. For her mind
Shaped strictest plans of discipline. Sage schemes!
Such as Lycurgus taught, when, at the shrine
Of the Orthyan goddess, he bade flog
The little Spartans; such as erst chastised
Our Milton, when at college. For this act
Did Brownrigg swing. Harsh laws! But time shall come,
When France shall reign, and laws be all repealed.

I cite these lines, though the style of parody in them is not very brilliant, because they are the opening poem of *The Anti-Jacobin*, because, through the immense effect that

they produced on the public mind, the associated wits doubtless perceived that they had struck into the right path of satire, and because, in their fierce directness, they give the keynote to that philosophy of classical common sense, which is, throughout the Review, opposed to Rousseau's gospel of Romantic sentimentalism. In a much finer vein are the purely literary parodies of the metrical experiments by which the Revolutionary poets strove to commend their sentimental doctrines. Of these, of course, by far the most famous is the admirable *Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder*, in which Southey is again the victim; but the ridicule of the same poet's "Dactylics," together with those of Coleridge, as illustrated in *The Soldier's Wife*, is almost equally happy. The latter poem is as follows:

Weary way-wanderer, languid and sick at heart,
Travelling painfully over the rugged road,
Wild-visaged wanderer! Ah! for thy heavy chance!

Sorely thy little one drags by thee, bare-footed,
Cold is the baby that hangs at thy bending back—
Meagre and livid, and screaming its wretchedness.

Woe-begone mother, half anger, half agony,
As over thy shoulder thou lookest to hush the babe,
Bleakly the blinding snow beats in thy haggard face.[1]

Thy husband will never return from the war again;
Cold is thy helpless heart, even as charity—
Cold are thy famished babes.—God help thee, widowed one!

Canning's parody runs:

*The Quintessence of all the Dactylics that ever were, or ever will be written.*

Wearisome Sonneteer, feeble and querulous,
Painfully dragging out thy democratic lays—
Moon-stricken Sonneteer, "Ah! for thy heavy chance!"

Sorely thy dactylics lag on uneven feet:
Slow is the syllable which thou wouldst urge to speed,
Lame and o'erburthened, and "screaming its wretchedness!"

. . . . . .

[1] This stanza is by Coleridge.

> Ne'er talk of ears again! look at thy spelling-book;
> *Dilworth* and *Dyche* are both mad at thy quantities—
> Dactylics call'st thou 'em? "God help thee, silly one!"

Jacobinical sentiments, embodied in metres which were themselves revolutionary, by poets whose fame was not yet established, offered an ample mark to the Tory wits. The case was different when the same doctrines were advocated by men of position and influence in forms of verse recommended by the usage of eminent poets. Nothing indeed is more indicative of the decay of taste in the ruling portion of Society at the close of the eighteenth century than the attempts of third-rate writers to revive the chivalric or ethical styles of poetry in the atmosphere of French sentimentalism. Merry, the would-be Petrarch of the times, was an eager champion of the new principles of Gallic Liberty; and though the pretensions of the Della Cruscans had been adequately treated in the somewhat heavy-handed satire of Gifford, the fashionable didactic poetry of the day still remained as a channel for the circulation of revolutionary principles. Enjoying a certain prestige, as the poetical progeny of the *Essay on Man*, didactic compositions like Payne Knight's *Progress of Civil Society* and Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, from their appeal to Reason, Science, and Natural Religion, obtained a large and respectful audience. Knight (1750-1824), a member of Parliament, a learned virtuoso, and a painstaking student of the mysteries of Priapus, though devoid of all imagination, was capable of writing smooth couplets, the ponderous pomposity of which gave his verse a certain appearance of philosophy well calculated to impose awe on the simple-minded reader. His didactic poetry had already roused the wrath of Mathias, whose virulent invective probably only confirmed Knight's votaries in their admiration; and it remained for the satirists of *The Anti-Jacobin* to destroy the reputation of *The Progress of Civil Society* by the fineness of their ridicule.

The design of *The Progress of Man* is of admirable skill. Imagining a fictitious didactic poet, Mr. Higgins of St. Mary Axe, the Editors of *The Anti-Jacobin* took

him gravely into their confidence, and obtained from him for their Review extracts from an unpublished poem, together with reasoned disquisitions on the principles by which it was inspired. The memory of *The Progress of Civil Society* has so entirely perished that it is difficult for the modern reader fully to appreciate the absurdity of the poetry which passed with our ancestors of that period as philosophical and profound: it may, however, be divined from the fidelity with which the parodist imitates the form of the Argument prefixed by Knight to his poem:

## THE PROGRESS OF MAN

### A Didactic Poem

IN FORTY CANTOS WITH NOTES CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY: CHIEFLY OF A PHILOSOPHICAL TENDENCY

DEDICATED TO R. P. KNIGHT, ESQ.

CANTO FIRST

CONTENTS.—The subject proposed—Doubts and Waverings—Queries not to be answered.—Formation of the stupendous Whole.—Cosmogony; or the Creation of the World:—the Devil—Man—Various Classes of Being:—ANIMATED BEINGS—Birds—Fish—Beasts—The Influence of the Sexual Appetite—on Tigers—on Whales—on Crimpt Cod—on Perch—on Shrimps—on Oysters.—Various Stations assigned to different Animals:—Birds—Bears—Mackerel.—Bears remarkable for their fur—Mackerel cried on a Sunday—Birds do not graze nor Fishes fly—nor Beasts live in the Water.—Plants equally contented with their lot: Potatoes—Cabbage—Lettuce—Leeks—Cucumbers. MAN only discontented—born a Savage; not choosing to continue so becomes polished—resigns his Liberty—Priest-craft—King-craft—Tyranny of Laws and Institutions—Savage Life—description thereof:—The Savage free—roaming Woods—feeds on Hips and Haws—Animal Food—first notion of it from seeing a Tiger tearing his prey—wonders if it is good—resolves to try—makes a Bow and Arrow—Kills a Pig—resolves to roast a part of it—lights a fire—APOSTROPHE to fires—Spits and Jacks not yet invented—Digression—CORINTH—SHEFFIELD.—Love the most natural desire, after Food.—Savage Courtship—Concubinage recommended—Satirical Reflections on Parents and Children—Husbands and Wives—against Collateral Consanguinity—FREEDOM the only Morality, etc. etc. etc.

Mr. Higgins opens his poem with the large liberty of speculation characteristic of the philosophers of the day, and concludes:

> Whether the joys of earth, the hopes of heaven,
> By man to God or God to man were given?

If virtue leads to bliss, or vice to woe,
Who rules above, or who reside below,
Vain questions all—shall man presume to know?
On all these points, and points obscure as these,
Think they who will—and think whate'er they please.

He himself will pursue "a plainer steadier theme," and proceeds in a passage ridiculing with equal happiness the emphatic platitudes and sham antitheses of Knight's didactic style and Rousseau's theory of the superiority of the State of Nature over that of civilised Society:

First—to each living thing, whate'er its kind,
Some lot, some part, some station is assigned.
The feathered race with pinions skim the air—
Not so the mackerel, and still less the bear:
*This* roams the *wood*, carniv'rous, for his prey!
*That* with soft roe pursues his *watery* way:
*This*, slain by hunters, yields his shaggy hide;
*That*, caught by fishers, is on *Sundays* cried.

But each, contented with his humble sphere,
Moves unambitious through the circling year;
Nor e'er forgets the fortune of his race,
Nor pines to quit, nor strives to change his place.
Ah! who has seen the mailèd lobster rise,
Clap her broad wings, and soaring claim the skies?
When did the owl, descending from her bow'r,
Crop, midst the fleecy flocks, the tender flow'r;
Or the young heifer plunge, with pliant limb,
In the salt wave, and fish-like strive to swim?

The same with plants—potatoes 'tatoes breed[1]—
Uncostly cabbage springs from cabbage seed,
Lettuce to lettuce, leeks to leeks succeed.
Nor e'er did cooling cucumbers presume
To flow'r like myrtles, or like violets bloom.

Man only—rash, refined, presumptuous man—
Starts from his rank, and mars creation's plan.
Born the free heir of nature's wide domain,
To art's strict limits bounds his narrow'd reign;
Resigns his native rights for meaner things,
For faith and fetters—laws, and priests, and kings.

[1] v. 50. *Potatoes 'tatoes breed.* Elision for the sake of verse, not meant to imply that the root degenerates. Not so with man—

mox daturus
progeniem vitiosiorem.

After furnishing several numbers of *The Anti-Jacobin* with further extracts from his poem, Mr. Higgins is relieved from the task of parodying Payne Knight, and undertakes to deal with the principles and style of Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants*, in a poem called *The Loves of the Triangles*, of which he gives the following account:

I am persuaded that there is no science, however abstruse, nay, no trade or manufacture, which may not be taught by a didactic poem. In that before you, an attempt is made (not unsuccessfully, I hope) *to enlist the imagination under the banners of Geometry*. *Botany* I found done to my hands. And though the more rigid and unbending stiffness of a mathematical subject does not admit of the same appeals to the warmer passions, which naturally arise out of the *sexual* (or, as I have heard several worthy gentlewomen of my acquaintance, who delight much in the poem to which I allude, term it, by a slight misnomer, no way difficult to be accounted for—the *sensual*) system of Linnaeus;—yet I trust that the range and variety of illustration with which I have endeavoured to ornament and enlighten the arid truths of Euclid and Algebra, will be found to have smoothed the road of Demonstration, to have softened the rugged features of Elementary Propositions, and, as it were, to have strewn the *Asses' Bridge* with flowers.

In an earlier chapter I have dwelt upon the characteristics of Darwin's poetry, and the reader can therefore observe for himself the skill with which these are illustrated in what may be safely called the finest parody in the English language. After celebrating the "too licentious love" of "Sly Rectangle" for *three* Curves at once, Mr. Higgins, after the manner of *The Botanic Garden*, goes on to decorate the subject with a multitude of similes, in the following delightful passage:

> Thus, happy France! in thy regenerate land,
> Where TASTE with RAPINE saunters hand in hand;
> Where, nursed in seats of innocence and bliss,
> REFORM greets TERROR with fraternal kiss;
> Where mild PHILOSOPHY first taught to scan
> The wrongs of PROVIDENCE, and *rights* of Man;
> Where MEMORY broods o'er FREEDOM'S earlier scene,
> The *Lantern* bright, and brighter *Guillotine*;
> *Three* gentle swains evolve their longing arms,
> And woo the young REPUBLIC'S virgin charms;

And though proud *Barras* with the fair succeed,
Though not in vain the Attorney *Rewbell* plead,
Oft doth th' impartial nymph their love forego,
To clasp thy crooked shoulders, blest *Lepaux*.

So with dark dirge, athwart the blasted heath,
*Three* sister witches hailed th' appalled Macbeth.

So, the *Three* Fates beneath grim Pluto's roof,
Strain the dun warp, and weave the murky woof;
Till deadly Atropos with fatal shears
Slits the thin promise of th' expected years,
While 'midst the dungeon's gloom, or battle's din,
Ambition's victims perish as they spin.
Thus the *Three* Graces, on th' Idalian green,
Bow with deft homage to Cythera's queen;
Her polished arms with pearly bracelets deck,
Part her light locks, and bare her ivory neck;
Round her fair form ethereal odours throw,
And teach th' unconscious zephyrs where to blow;
Floats the thin gauze, and glittering as they play,
The bright folds flutter in phlogistic day.

So, with his daughters *Three*, th' unsceptred Lear
Heaved the loud sigh, and poured the glistering tear:
His daughters *Three*, save one alone, conspire
(Rich in his gifts) to spurn their generous sire;
Bid the rude storm his hoary tresses drench,
Stint the spare meal, the hundred knights retrench;
Mock his mad sorrow, and, with altered mien,
Renounce the daughter, and assert the queen.
A father's griefs his feeble frame convulse,
Rack his white head, and fire his feverous pulse;
Till kind Cordelia soothes his soul to rest,
And folds the parent-monarch to her breast.

Thus some fair spinster grieves in wild affright,
Vexed with dull megrim, or vertigo light;
Pleased round the fair *Three* dawdling doctors stand,
Wave the white wig, and stretch the asking hand,
State the grave doubt, the nauseous draught decree,
And all receive, though none deserve, a fee.

So down thy hill, romantic Ashbourn, glides
The Derby dilly, carrying *Three* INSIDES.
One in each corner sits, and lolls at ease,
With folded arms, propt back, and outstretched knees,
While the pressed *Bodkin*, punched and squeezed to death,
Sweats in the midmost place, and scolds, and pants for breath.[1]

[1] See pp. 37-9.

Mr. Higgins' talents were not confined to illustrating the character of the didactic poetry of his age: the Editors of *The Anti-Jacobin* also employed his versatility to ridicule the rage for the German romantic style then prevailing in the theatres.

"With this view," says Mr. Higgins (for we love to quote the very words of this extraordinary and indefatigable writer), "with this view," says he, in a letter dated from his study in St. Mary Axe, the window of which looks upon the parish pump,—"with this view I have turned my thoughts more particularly to the German stage, and have composed—in imitation of the most popular pieces of that country, which have already met with so general reception and admiration in this—a Play; which, if it has a proper run, will, I think, do much to unhinge the present notions of men with regard to the obligations of civil society, and to substitute, in lieu of a sober contentment and regular discharge of the duties incident to each man's particular situation, a wild desire of undefinable latitude and extravagance,—an aspiration after shapeless somethings that can neither be described nor understood,—a contemptuous disgust at all that *is*, and a persuasion that nothing is as it ought to be;—to operate, in short, a general discharge of every man (in his own estimation) from every tie which laws, divine or human, which local customs, immemorial habits, and multiplied examples, impose upon him; and to set them about doing what they like, where they like, and how they like,—without reference to any law but their own will, or to any consideration of how others may be affected by their conduct.

. . . . . .

"The subject of the piece which I herewith transmit to you, is taken from common or middling life; and its merit is that of teaching the most lofty truths in the most humble style, and deducing them from the most ordinary occurrences. Its moral is obvious and easy; and is one frequently inculcated by the German dramas which I have had the good fortune to see; being no other than 'the reciprocal duties of one or more husbands to one or more wives, and to the children who may happen to arise out of this complicated and endearing connection.' The plot, indeed, is formed by the combination of the plots of *two* of the most popular of these plays (in the same way as Terence was wont to combine two stories of Menander's). The characters are such as the admirers of these plays will recognise for their familiar acquaintances. There are the usual ingredients of

imprisonments, post-horses and horns, and appeals to angels and devils. I have omitted only the *swearing*, to which English ears are not yet sufficiently accustomed."

It would be unfair to the merits of *The Rovers; or The Double Arrangement*, here described, to attempt to give those readers who are not acquainted with it any idea, by means of an extract, of its excellent humour. Many, who have not read the play, probably know the inimitable Song of Rogero on the University of Gottingen; but the fidelity of the piece to its German models, in respect of the romantic contradictions arising out of the confusion of the manners of different ages, the blending of bourgeois homeliness with heroic vapourings, and the combination of the most colloquial idioms with the stilted phrases of the stage, can only be rightly appreciated in the drama taken as a whole. The list of the *Dramatis Personae*, however, is sufficiently suggestive of the satirist's points:

*Prior of the Abbey of Quedlinburgh*, very corpulent and cruel.
*Rogero*, a prisoner in the Abbey, in love with Matilda Pottingen.
*Casimere*, a Polish emigrant, in Dembrowsky's legion, married to Cecilia but having several children by *Matilda*.
*Puddingfield and Beefington*, English noblemen, exiled by the tyranny of King John, previous to the signature of Magna Charta.
*Roderic*, Count of Saxe-Weimar, a bloody tyrant, with red hair, and an amorous complexion.
*Gaspar*, the Minister of the Count,—author of *Rogero's* confinement.
*Young Pottingen*, brother to *Matilda*.
*Matilda Pottingen*, in love with Rogero, and mother to *Casimere's* children.
*Cecilia Mückenfeld*, wife to *Casimere*.
Landlady, Waiter, Grenadiers, Troubadours, etc.
*Pantalowsky* and *Britchenda*, children of *Matilda* by *Casimere*.
*Joachim, Jabel*, and *Amarantha*, children of *Matilda* by *Rogero*.
Children of *Casimere* and *Cecilia* with their respective Nurses.
Several children—fathers and mothers unknown.

*The scene lies in the town of Weimar, and the neighbourhood of the Abbey of Quedlinburgh.*

*Time from the twelfth to the present century.*

Having thus heaped the ridicule of his varied irony on the arts by which the new revolutionary principles were being recommended to the imagination of the people, Canning concluded his enterprise by an earnest denunciation of the principles themselves. *New Morality* is a serious satire, conceived in a lofty and impassioned spirit. Opening with an appeal to the patriotism of the English youth, the poet adjures them to clear their mind of cant, and consider the real dangers by which the Constitution of their country was being threatened :

> If Vice appal thee,—if thou view with awe
> Insults that brave, and crimes that scape the law ;
> Yet may the specious bastard brood, which claim
> A spurious homage under Virtue's name,
> Sprung from that parent of ten thousand crimes,
> The *New Philosophy* of modern times,—
> Yet, these may rouse thee.—With unsparing hand,
> Oh, lash the vile impostures from the land.

One by one "the bastard brood" of so-called Virtues are then dragged into the light, and stripped of the disguises in which they masquerade. Philanthropy, Sensibility, Justice, Candour are made to exhibit their real natures, in a style of which the satire on Sensibility may be taken as an example :

> Sweet child of sickly Fancy !—her of yore
> From her loved France Rousseau to exile bore ;
> And, while midst lakes and mountains wild he ran,
> Full of himself, and shunned the haunts of man,
> Taught her, o'er each lone vale and Alpine steep,
> To lisp the story of his wrongs, and weep ;
> Taught her to cherish still in either eye
> Of tender tears a plentiful supply,
> And pour them in the brooks that babbled by ;
> Taught by nice scale to mete her feelings strong,
> False by degrees and exquisitely wrong ;
> For the crushed beetle *first*,—the widow'd dove,
> And all the warbled sorrows of the grove ;
> *Next* for poor suffering *guilt* ; and *last* of all
> For parents, friends, a king and country's fall.
>
> Mark her fair votaries, prodigal of grief,
> With cureless pangs, and woes that mock relief,
> Droop in soft sorrow o'er a faded flower ;
> O'er a dead jack-ass pour the pearly shower ;

But hear unmoved, of *Loire's* ensanguined flood,
Choked up with slain; of *Lyons* drenched in blood;
Of crimes that blot the age, the world, with shame,
Foul crimes, but sicklied o'er with Freedom's name;
Altars and thrones subverted; social life
Trampled to earth,—the husband from the wife,
Parent from child, with ruthless fury torn,
Of talents, honour, virtue, wit, forlorn,
In friendless exile,—of the wise and good
Staining the daily scaffold with their blood;
Of savage cruelties, that scare the mind,
The rage of madness with hell's lusts combined,—
Of hearts torn reeking from the mangled breast,
They hear—and hope that ALL IS FOR THE BEST.

This passage is thoroughly representative alike of the genius of Canning and of the spirit animating *The Anti-Jacobin*. Like the argument of the great orator by whom it was inspired it is one-sided; and herein lay its strength. The times called for action, and men had to make up their minds to be for or against the French Revolution. Those who were in favour of it during its early stages, ought, as the Bishop of Llandaff did, to have owned, as its character developed, that they had been mistaken in their forecast. They did not do so; their pride forebade them; and, as Wordsworth allows in *The Prelude*, and Coleridge suggests in his mock *Recantation*, they contented themselves with reasoning that the crimes and excesses of the Revolutionary Government were the *inevitable* result of ages of misgovernment; at the same time they furiously blamed their own country for engaging in a war which it could not avoid. In attempting to preserve a middle and philosophical position at the moment of crisis, without any acknowledgment of error in themselves, such partisans justly became liable to the accusation of sophistry; and this charge Canning presses home to them in *New Morality*. Straightforward manliness is the leading feature in his own satire. As he says in characterising "Candour":

Give me th' avowed, th' erect, the manly foe,
Bold I can meet—perhaps may turn his blow;
But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,
Save, save, oh! save me from the *Candid Friend*!

Full of an ardent patriotism, and forced to take up arms against the internal enemies of the English Constitution, it was not his business to make fine distinctions, and balance the literary beauties of Rousseau's style—which no one was more capable than he of appreciating—against its social mischief. He rightly fixed his view on the moral relation of the Revolutionary movement to the life of his own country; and the power of his satire lies not less in his unerring perception of the tendencies which formed the key of the enemy's position, than in the wit, the fancy, the passion, and indignation which he brought to bear against them.

In Canning the civic genius of the Renaissance, acting on English statesmen and men of letters, finds its most admirable representative. One-sided though his satire is, it is, nevertheless, full of the spirit of constitutional compromise. The Renaissance, in its civic capacity, acted apart from both the two great opposing extremes—Absolutism, springing out of the decay of mediæval traditions, and Democracy, arising from the subversive temper of the Reformation: its function was to reconcile conflicting powers in a new form of Government without any breach in the continuity of national life. With this spirit the *Reflections on the French Revolution* and *The Anti-Jacobin* are alike animated. The triumph of the Revolution of 1688 was to fuse the elements of the constitution which had been rudely torn asunder in the Civil War; and if the principles of the aristocratic *régime* of which Somers and Halifax were the creators derive their highest glory from the philosophy of Burke, its character has been scarcely less worthily exalted in the poetry of Canning.

As the genius of the civic Renaissance is the inspiring principle of Canning's satire, so the ancient traditions of the English language, formed by the influence of the Renaissance, are preserved in his style. He had imbibed in full measure the classical scholarship and the social discipline of the great school in which he was educated. Not less clearly than Coleridge under the tuition of

Bowyer,[1] he had learned at Eton how to detect the spurious classicism of Darwin's manner; at the same time his sympathy with Dryden and Pope showed him, what Coleridge failed to see, that the disease corrupting the genius of the language might be eradicated by the use, if necessary, of fire or the knife. Hating affectation with the same intensity as Gifford, his mellower nature and more refined taste knew how to avoid that laboured virulence in satirising the objects of his dislike which often disfigures the style of the author of *The Baviad* and *The Maeviad*. The gallant gaiety of Canning's parodies makes them delightful reading even in a day when all memory of the originals has vanished; on the other hand, when he becomes serious, a certain touch of the mannerisms of his time distinguishes his satiric style from the rhetoric of Pope, just as his parliamentary eloquence displays a pure classical character different in kind from the elaborate stateliness of Pitt. The following passage will illustrate my meaning:

Britain, beware; nor let th' insidious foe,
Of force despairing, aim a deadlier blow;
Thy peace, thy strength, with devilish wiles assail,
And when her arms are vain by arts prevail.
True, thou art rich, art powerful!—thro' thine Isle
Industrious skill, contented labour, smile;
Far seas are studded with thy countless sails;
What wind but wafts them, and what shore but hails?
True, thou art brave!—o'er all the busy land
In patriot ranks embattled myriads stand;
Thy foes behold with impotent amaze,
And drop the lifted weapon as they gaze.

But what avails to guard each outward part,
If subtlest poison, circling at thy heart,
Spite of thy courage, of thy power, and wealth,
Mine the sound fabric of thy vital health?

So thine own oak, by some fair streamlet's side,
Waves its broad arms, and spreads its leafy pride,
Towers from the earth, and rearing to the skies
Its conscious strength, the tempest's wrath defies:
Its ample branches shield the fowls of air,
To its cool shade the panting herds repair.

[1] See p. 193.

> The treacherous current works its noiseless way,
> The fibres loosen, and the roots decay;
> Prostrate the beauteous ruin lies; and all
> That shared its shelter perish in its fall.

Mathias' work shows the widespread influence of the Renaissance on English Literature, Canning's its intimate association with English Politics. A third aspect of the same subject is illustrated by the genius of Canning's chief friend and colleague, John Hookham Frere. Frere was closely connected with Canning from early boyhood. He co-operated with him at Eton in the conduct of *The Microcosm*; in the wit of *The Anti-Jacobin* their names are joined as were those of Beaumont and Fletcher in the history of the drama; and so congenial were their natures that it is often as difficult to distinguish the hand of one from that of the other in their joint compositions as it is to assign with certainty the authorship of a critical essay in *The Spectator* to Addison rather than to Steele. While Canning, however, continued to carry on the combat with Anti-Jacobinism to the end of his career in the field of politics, circumstances caused Frere to retire early from active life, and his latter years were spent mainly in his country home or in foreign parts; but wherever he went he carried with him the same love of classical letters that solaced the leisure of Harley, Bolingbroke, Bathurst, Carteret, Fox, and all the chief political leaders of the eighteenth century. His old political inclinations still revealed themselves in his choice of authors; and the keenness with which he had entered into the political struggle in his youth enabled him, in his declining days, to interpret and reproduce the kindred passions expressed by ancient authors, with a fidelity that has made him in many respects the finest translator in the English language.

John Hookham Frere was born in London on the 21st of May 1769. He came of an ancient stock, settled as influential landowners, though without rising into political prominence, in Norfolk and Suffolk. His own verses on the family coat-of-arms are characteristic of the

deep feeling for the soil and institutions of his country which inspires his poetical contributions to *The Anti-Jacobin.*

> The Flanches on our field of Gules
> Denote, by known heraldic rules,
> A race contented and obscure,
> In mediocrity secure,
> By sober parsimony thriving,
> For their retired existence striving.
> By well-judged purchases and matches,
> Far from ambition and debauches;
> Such was the life our fathers led;
> Their homely leaven, deep inbred
> In our whole moral composition,
> Confines us to the like condition.

John Frere, his father, a man of great mathematical ability, who ran Paley hard for the honours of senior wrangler, had also scientific and antiquarian tastes, and, as a Fellow of the Royal Society, frequently contributed a paper for their *Philosophical Transactions*, besides writing for *The Gentleman's Magazine.* His son was sent to Eton in 1785, where he became a member of the brilliant group of friends who, under the leadership of Canning, produced and carried on *The Microcosm.* Entering Caius College, Cambridge, in 1788, he graduated B.A. in 1792 and M.A in 1795. In the former year he obtained the Members' Prize for a Latin Essay on the prospects of Botany Bay—a subject which, as appears from Southey's Eclogues, was then attracting public attention—and he was soon afterwards elected Fellow of his college. On leaving Cambridge he worked in the Foreign Office under Lord Grenville. In 1796 he was elected M.P. for the close borough of West Looe in Cornwall, and sat for it till the dissolution of Parliament in 1802, being of course a firm supporter of Pitt. He was Canning's chief assistant in the conduct of *The Anti-Jacobin.* As I have already said, it is exceedingly difficult to determine, from internal evidence, the shares of the several poets in pieces which are known to have been the work of more than one hand. It appears that the different papers were written in the

house of Wright the publisher, and left open by the authors on the table for additions or corrections by their colleagues ; the designs of each contribution were doubtless discussed in conference. From the statements of Frere, however, we know that of these joint productions some part of *The Knife-Grinder* came from his pen ; that he contributed a portion of the "Extract from the Twenty-Third Canto" of *The Progress of Man* ; the opening extract from Canto 1 of *The Loves of the Triangles*, and much of the continuation ; of *The Rovers* the extremely amusing first Act up to the Song of Rogero (which was the composition of Canning and Ellis) ; of Act ii. the news of the signing of *Magna Charta* in Scene 2 ; and the whole of Act iv. The opening lines in *New Morality* up to "No hope, no prospect to redeem it left" ; the passage beginning "To thee proud Barras bows," down to "Paine, Williams, Godwin, Holcroft, praise Lepaux"—are also his work.

In 1800 Frere was appointed Minister at Lisbon, being transferred thence, on the 6th of September 1802, to Spain, where he remained as Minister till August 1804, when, owing to differences of opinion with Godoy, the incapable "Prince of Peace," a change in the Embassy was made and he returned to England. To Spain he was again sent as Minister Plenipotentiary to Ferdinand VII., but having—in all probability unjustly—to bear the blame for the failure of Sir John Moore's expedition in 1808, he was replaced by Lord Wellesley in 1809. After his recall to England, though he was at a later date offered the Embassy at St. Petersburg, Frere's political life ended. The death of his father in 1807 had put him in possession of the family estates, the management of which, varied by periodical visits to London, where he mixed much in the literary society of the day, gave him abundance of occupation and amusement. In 1816 he married Elizabeth, Dowager Countess of Erroll, and in the following year published his English imitation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, viz. : *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work, By William and Robert Whistlecraft of Stow-Market in Suffolk, Harness and Collar Makers, Intended to comprise the most*

*interesting particulars relating to King Arthur and his Round Table.* A second part of this work was published, together with the first, in 1818, with the title *Monks and the Giants.* Though not popular, the poem gave Byron the hint for the style of *Beppo*, and afterwards of *Don Juan.* The health of his wife compelled Frere in 1820 to leave England, and in 1821 he settled in Malta, never again to revisit his own country. Lady Erroll died there in 1831, and he himself had become so accustomed to the place, and and was so much broken in health, that he feared to return to a more severe climate. His translation of Aristophanes, begun in England, many years before, was finished in Malta, and printed in 1837 by the official press of the island, but was never published in his lifetime. He died at Valetta on the 7th of January 1846, and was laid beside his wife and sister in the English Burial Ground.

Frere is one of the most pleasing figures in the history of English Literature. By birth he belonged to the order of country gentlemen, whose manners had experienced the refining influence of the Renaissance, and his works show all the excellences, without any of the defects, characteristic of the genius of men like Horace Walpole, Shenstone, and Somervile. He had Walpole's love of art and letters, without his artificiality; Shenstone's taste for simplicity, without his affectation; and Somervile's delight in the country joined to a keen appreciation of the pleasures of society in London. Reverence for custom, loyalty, honour, generosity, and family affection, were the distinguishing features of a character which is well described in a passage of Coleridge's will:

> To Mr. Gillman . . . I leave the manuscript volume lettered "Arist. Manuscript—Birds, Acharnians, Knights," presented to me by my dear friend and patron, the Rt. Hon. John Hookham Frere, who, of all the men that I have had the means of knowing during my life, appears to me eminently to deserve to be characterised as ὁ καλοκἀγαθὸς ὁ φιλόκαλος.

As a translator—for apart from his parodies in *The Anti-Jacobin* it is in this capacity that his genius shines most brightly—he attains the highest eminence; and no

better proof of his fitness for the office need be desired than the definition furnished by himself in his *Review of Mitchell's Aristophanes*:

> The proper domain of the Translator is, we conceive, to be found in that vast mass of feeling, passion, interest, action and habit, which is common to mankind in all countries and in all languages, is invested with its appropriate forms of expression, capable of representing it in all its infinite varieties, in all the permanent distinctions of age, profession and temperament, which have remained immutable, and of which the identity is to be traced almost in every page of the author before us.[1]

No ancient poet is so difficult to render into a foreign language on this principle as Aristophanes; for none is so local and idiomatic; and, as Frere points out, his translators are liable to fall into two opposite errors: either of reproducing too faithfully the antique details of their original, in which case the translation appears pedantic; or of finding a spirited literary equivalent for the style, an attempt which usually ends in destroying the imaginative illusion. Mitchell's translation, Frere justly observes, exhibits the latter fault through the author's endeavour to adopt a manner not natural to himself—viz. that of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists—as the vehicle for the thoughts of the original. Frere's own translation avoids both faults. Without trying to be strictly literal, he conveys Aristophanes' meaning in metrical language with such spirit and energy as to leave in the reader's mind the feeling that he has been reading an original English work. The following passage, taken from the closing portion of *The Knights*, is a good specimen of the poetical ease, happiness, and harmony of the translation:

CHORUS. O, thou the protector and hope of the state,
Of the isles and allies of the city, relate
What happy event do you call us to greet,
With bonfire and sacrifice filling the street?
AGORACRITUS. Old Demus within has moulted his skin;
I've cooked him and stewed him to render him stronger,
Many years younger, and shabby no longer.

[1] *Quarterly Review* for July 1820.

CHORUS. Oh, what a change! How sudden and strange!
But where is he now?

AGORACRITUS. On the citadel's brow,
In the lofty old town of immortal renown,
With the noble Ionian violet crown.

CHORUS. What was his vesture, his figure and gesture?
How did you leave him, and how does he look?

AGORACRITUS. Joyous and bold, as when feasting of old,
When his battles were ended, triumphant and splendid,
With Miltiades sitting carousing at rest,
Or good Aristides his favourite guest.
You shall see him here straight; for the citadel gate
Is unbarred; and the hinges—you hear how they grate!

(*The Scene changes to a view of the Propylaeum.*)

Give a shout for the sight of the rocky old height
And the worthy old wight that inhabits within!

CHORUS. Thou glorious hill! pre-eminent still
For splendour of empire and honour and worth!
Exhibit him here for the Greeks to revere,
Their patron and master, the monarch of earth!

AGORACRITUS. There see him, behold! with the jewels of gold
Entwined in his hair, in the fashion of old,
Not dreaming of verdicts, or dirty decrees;
But lordly, majestic, attired at his ease,
Perfuming all Greece with an odour of peace.

CHORUS. We salute you, and greet you, and bid you rejoice,
With unanimous heart, with unanimous voice,
Our sovereign lord in glory restored,
Returning amongst us in royal array,
Worthy the trophies of Marathon's day!

No one who compares Frere's translation with the original can fail to admire the sympathetic spirit in which he has realised his author's meaning, and the dramatic skill with which he has adapted his own English style to the changing scenes of the Greek, varying it from the vulgar style of the market-place to lofty and impassioned rhetoric, only brought down to the proper level by sudden and unexpected touches of burlesque. If we look for the secret of the successful achievement of a feat so difficult, it may perhaps be doubted whether Frere himself has given an adequate account of it. He says,

justly, that the great merit of Aristophanes' comic style lies in its true rendering of human nature in all ages, which he goes on to describe as the method of conscious poetical "generalisation"; and he thinks that, by close study, the translator, generalising in the same way, may arrive at the inner meaning of his author. This analytical process appears rather too much like that of the German Commentators on Shakespeare, such as Gervinus and Ulrici, who—as I have shown elsewhere—often credit the poet with amazing philosophical theories, arising out of their own lack of humour.[1] Humour could never have deserted Frere; but, in my opinion, his theory of Aristophanes' process of "generalisation," joined to his own political sympathies and antipathies, has sometimes betrayed him into super-subtleties of interpretation, and consequently into misconceptions of the character of his original. For example, in the *Acharnians*, Lamachus is represented in a somewhat ridiculous situation, which Frere is perplexed to account for, since Lamachus and Aristophanes both belonged to the same party. He endeavours to explain it in an imaginary dialogue between the poet and the soldier:

*L.* Why should you make your friend Dicaeopolis talk such low vulgar trash to the Chorus; as if men without birth or education were as well fitted for public employment as persons of my sort? We have had a good education, at least, and are used to live in a liberal society:—it seems so contrary to your principles that I am at a loss to comprehend your drift.

*A.* Then I will tell you; it is precisely the men of your sort (the young rising promising set) that have brought us into our present difficulties. Pericles was employing the public resources, splendidly and usefully—embellishing the city; giving occupation to a multitude of the poorer class; creating future resources for us; and (as he thought) strengthening his own interest by the patronage attached to this peaceful harmless sort of expenditure. But he and his administration were grown old; a new generation had sprung up, who thought themselves active enough and clever enough to begin fingering the public money. . . . I have seen all this: and now I see you (the very same young gentlemen) extremely indignant at finding yourselves

[1] See vol. iv. pp. 19-23.

occasionally hustled and jostled and ousted in your contests for office by the very individual ragamuffins who were your agents among the populace at the time when you succeeded in raising an uproar against Pericles. Now, for my own part, I feel quite incapable of sympathising with these exalted and indignant sentiments; I prefer you (no doubt) to your new rivals; but whenever they happen to get the better of you I console myself with the reflection, that your present mortifications are the result of your own measures—that you have in fact nothing to complain of, except that you are deprived (perhaps with some mortifying circumstances) of the fruits of your own unjustifiable policy. And lastly; that after all the remedy is in your own hands; if you will unite yourselves to make a peace, your own salaries, and this offensive rivalry on the part of your inferiors, will cease together at once, and so I think Dicaeopolis has told you.

This "generalisation" seems much too ethical and serious. Aristophanes was no doubt a vehement partisan; but he was above all things a comic poet. Though it was his intention to exhibit the conduct of his opponents in a ridiculous light, it was his main business to amuse the audience, and he achieved both objects by inventing central situations of enormous improbability, which could nevertheless be easily imagined, and to which imaginary circumstances all the incidents of the comedy had to be brought into proper relation. If Aristophanes' friends helped to heighten his effects by being made to look absurd, they, in conformity with the spirit of broad fun prevailing at the Dionysia, would without the least hesitation be sacrificed to the joke. In the semi-chorus, consisting of the old Acharnians, the war party of the deme would naturally attack Dicaeopolis when he comes to make his separate treaty of peace, and the dramatic character of the situation could best be represented by summoning to their aid Lamachus, as the most soldier-like leader among the party favouring war with Sparta. Dicaeopolis, as the hero of the play, and in favour of peace, would have the sympathy of the spectators, when getting the better of Lamachus in their wrestling bout; and none of the audience would have thought of such a politico-moral allegory as Frere puts into the mouth of the poet.

Nevertheless, it is this very closeness of interpretation, here carried to excess, that makes Frere incomparable as a translator of Aristophanes. His success is due partly to his intuitive sympathy with the Greek poet as a political partisan, in a state of society more or less resembling the party warfare of England, and partly to his talent for parody, the instrument with which Aristophanes produced many of his comic effects. The satirist of the French Jacobins appreciated, with the keenest relish, the farcical representation of the Paphlagonian slave in *The Knights*; the country gentleman of Norfolk had a native sympathy with the shrewd old farmer of Acharnae; the parodist of *The Loves of the Plants* entered heartily into the poetical cause of Æschylus, the representative of manly action in the drama, as opposed to the whining philosophies of Euripides. By the strength of his Anti-Jacobin feeling Frere was able to throw his imagination, with a whole-hearted enthusiasm, into the ancient situations imagined by Aristophanes, and to reproduce them in English with a natural and modern air impossible to a mere literary translator like Mitchell, whose translation (at least in the ordinary dialogue) had, in a sense, to be itself translated out of the ancient English style of Ben Jonson into the English of the nineteenth century.

I must not leave this notice of the character of Anti-Jacobinism in English Poetry without observing its close association with the classical Renaissance. It was by no fortuitous coincidence that the great constitutional age in the political history of England was also the most brilliant—comprehending as it does the names of Bentley and Porson—in the history of English scholarship. In numberless ways the free civic genius of antiquity blended with the spirit of English institutions, and the living character of the Greek and Latin languages in the eighteenth century declares itself in the readiness with which English men of letters used them—and especially Latin—as vehicles for the expression of patriotic emotion. The age inaugurated by Addison's admirable Latin poem

on the Peace of Ryswick was closed by the compositions, equally excellent in the same kind, of Canning and the Marquis of Wellesley in *The Anti-Jacobin.* If the Latin verse of the latter is the simpler and more elegant, that of Canning in its ease, energy, and brilliance, as well as in the flexibility of its rhythm, is not less characteristic of the genius of the man than is the native idiom of *New Morality.* Lord Wellesley's subject was the duty of Britain to offer an unrelenting opposition on behalf of true Liberty to the aggressions of the French Directory; and it would be impossible to find a more elevated expression of the stern spirit animating the country than the enthusiastic and solemn lines with which the poem closes:

nec spes Pacis adhuc—necdum exsaturata rapinis
effera Bellatrix, fusove expleta cruore.
crescit inextinctus Furor, atque exaestuat ingens
Ambitio, immanisque ira Vindicta renata
reliquias Soliorum, et adhuc restantia Regna
flagitat excidio, praedaeque incumbit opimae.
una etenim in mediis Gens intemerata ruinis,
libertate proba, et justo libramine rerum,
securum faustis degit sub legibus aevum;
antiquosque colit mores, et jura Parentum
ordine firma suo, sanoque intacta vigore,
servat adhuc, hominumque fidem, curamque Deorum.
eheu! quanta odiis avidoque alimenta furori!
quanta profanatas inter spoliabitur aras
victima! si quando versis Victoria fatis
annuerit scelus extremum, terraque subacta
impius Oceani sceptrum foedaverit hostis.

Canning, taking up the theme where his old schoolfellow left it, proclaims, in more florid verse, that such an issue of the war is inconceivable; and he closes his poem *De Navali Laude Britanniae* with the following glowing prophecy of England's supremacy at sea:

macte ideo decus Oceani! macte omne per aevum
victrix, aequoreo stabilita Britannia regno!
litoribusque tuis ne propagnacula tantum
praesidio fore, nec saxi munimina credas,
nec tantum quae mille acies in utrumque parantur,
aut patriam tutari, aut non superesse cadenti;
invictae quantum metuenda tonitrua Classis,

> Angliacae Classis ; quae majestate verenda
> ultrix, inconcussa, diu dominabitur orbi,
> hostibus invidiosa tuis, et saepe triumphis
> nobilitate nova, pelagi Regina subacti.

Such was the dominant temper of a nation which, with rebellion threatened in Ireland, and mutiny prevailing in the Fleets at the Nore and at Spithead, without removing a vessel from the blockade of the Dutch coasts, confronted the whole power of the conqueror who had overwhelmed the armies of the mightiest monarchs of Europe, and who, having in the name of Revolutionary liberty established an iron despotism on the plains of Italy, the mother of modern civilisation, had crushed the historic freedom of the Swiss Republic!

# CHAPTER VII

## THE LAKE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH POETRY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

### WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: ROBERT SOUTHEY

THE region which gave a name to the school of English Poetry that began to exercise a new influence on taste at the close of the eighteenth century presented in its aspect a striking analogy to the general social condition of the English people. The repose of the stern mountains of Westmorland and Cumberland, enclosing quiet waters, and disturbed only by the movements of passing shadows and grazing sheep, reflected the general peace and order which, since the Revolution of 1688, had settled upon the constitution of society. Ruined towers and castles, scattered over the landscape, recalled the life of

> Old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago,

whether in the days of Border warfare, or in the struggle of the seventeenth century between feudal power and civil freedom. Time and Nature, however, had almost obliterated those traces of troublous times, which indeed served to link the affections of the inhabitants to a past dimly felt, without being actually remembered. The inhabitants themselves were of that middle class, yeomen, graziers, and country lawyers, which had for the most part sympathised with the Parliamentary cause in the great Civil War, but was well content with the constitutional compromise by which its own liberties and the free intercourse

of commerce and society had been secured. At the same time they were too far removed from the centre of political action to exert much influence on the course of affairs, and formed, in fact, part of the unrepresented classes in a system of government essentially oligarchical. In the words of the poet who specially represented its spirit, the Lake country was a

> Poor district, and which yet
> Retaineth more of ancient homeliness
> Than any other nook of English ground ;

a region in which, he continues,

> It was my fortune scarcely to have seen
> Through the whole tenor of my school-day time
> The face of one who, whether boy or man,
> Was vested with attention or respect
> Through claims of wealth or blood.[1]

It was natural that the imagination of a society like this, not deeply penetrated with the refinements of classic literature, should readily respond to the romantic sentiments which had already proved attractive to the taste of the aristocratic classes in the South of England, when presented to them in the poems of the pseudo-Ossian, the *Reliques of Ancient English Literature*, and the philosophy of Rousseau.

The three poets, whose close association with each other, and common residence in the Lake district, caused them to be classed in the public mind as a single group, could not be said to have acquired the title of "school" from any close resemblance in their genius and artistic style ; they were, in fact, distinguished by the most striking oppositions of character. Certain fundamental sympathies, however, drew them together, and, causing them to exercise a mutual influence on each other, justified the instinct of their critics in regarding them as literary allies. All of them were united in a deliberate opposition to the prevailing taste of the age. All of them were inspired at the outset by enthusiasm for the principles of the French Revolution. All of them were indignant with their own

[1] *The Prelude*, Book ix.

countrymen for their hostile attitude towards the French. Each of them after a time seceded from the political creed he had originally adopted, and finally joined the most obstinate of his former adversaries in opposing it. Their philosophical and religious faith was constantly modified by the change in their political opinions, which also exerted a powerful influence upon the growth of their artistic taste. In considering the progress of the Lake School it will be well therefore to keep the personal history of its three great leaders in close touch, noting the reciprocal influence, moral, political, and literary, which each exercised on his friend's genius, and the manner in which the combination was brought gradually to transform the established character of the public taste. In the case of two of them we are fortunately able to trace their poetic development by the aid of autobiography; the third, whose style departed less widely from accepted tradition, offers to the historian a comparatively easy subject of study from the simpler nature of his work.

William Wordsworth, the senior of the triumvirate, and the one most intimately connected by family associations with the Lake district, was born at Cockermouth on the 7th of April 1770. He was the second son of John Wordsworth—a solicitor in the town, and estate agent to Lord Lonsdale—and came of a stock originally derived from Yorkshire. In his *Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle* the poet speaks of the effect produced upon his youthful imagination by the air of feudal decay in the place; and in his sonnet *To the River Derwent* he carries back to a still earlier moment the influence of the natural objects which surrounded him from his birth:

> Among the mountains were we nursed, loved stream!
> Thou near the eagle's nest—within brief sail,
> I, of his bold wing floating on the gale,
> Where thy deep voice could lull me! Faint the beam
> Of human life, when first allowed to gleam
> On mortal notice.

Sent to school in his ninth year at Hawkshead, a village in the neighbourhood, he records in *The Prelude*

the virtues of the old Dame, "so kind and motherly," with whom he was boarded; and the master of the school, William Taylor, became the subject of his three poems on "Matthew." From his account of himself in *The Prelude* it would appear that it was on an occasion some time after his tenth year that he first realised in a semi-conscious way the mysterious power of Nature on his mind.[1] Following out the theory of his own poetic development, he supposes these unconscious influences to have been succeeded by a number of counteracting forces which checked and partially suppressed his creative faculty. The first was his education at Cambridge. He matriculated at St. John's College in October 1787. Here, as may readily be believed, he found little in the systematic studies of the University which he could reconcile with the vague impressions of society derived from his wanderings among the hills of Westmorland; nor is there anything in his autobiographical recollections of undergraduate life at Cambridge which is other than commonplace. He regards it indeed as a regular stage in his own intellectual growth, but, looking back on it in maturer years, he confesses that he is unable to distinguish how much of the feeling present at the time of writing was really in his mind during his student days;[2] his descriptions of University life are undefined, phantom-like, and wanting in character, as indeed is usually the case with his portraits of men and manners. He professes to have been able consciously to compare old age, as seen among the northern shepherds, with the examples of it among the Cambridge authorities—much, it is needless to say, to the disadvantage of the latter;[3]

[1] *Prelude*, Book i.: lines beginning "One summer evening," etc.

[2] Of these and other kindred notices
I cannot say what portion is in truth
The naked recollection of the time,
And what may rather have been called to life
By after-meditation.
*Prelude*, Book iii.

[3] See the lines beginning
Here on my view confronting visibly, etc.
*Prelude*, Book iii.

and he will not allow that he derived any benefit from his studies, beyond acquiring a certain power of arranging his hitherto confused ideas.[1]

The next of the influences on his mind, alien, as he conceived, to the true discipline of Nature, was political partisanship. In his third long vacation (1791) he started with a friend on a walking tour in France and Switzerland. Landing at Calais, on the eve of the National Federal fête, he shared the enthusiasm of the people for their newly acquired liberty, but experienced mixed feelings in the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, from which the monks had lately been expelled by the Republican Government. Otherwise he does not seem to have formed any very definite political ideas during his travels, and he admits that he realised little of the social significance of the revolutionary movement, and was content with the enjoyment of unfamiliar sights and sounds which he associated with the vague name of Liberty.[2]

Life in London did not render much clearer his conception of the world of society and action. In 1791 he took his degree of B.A., and without any fixed idea as to a profession (though his relatives pressed him to study for Orders), he resided aimlessly for a short time in the metropolis, getting (as he allows) a superficial and confused notion of the general movement of things, and mixing up a bird's-eye view of city life with pantheistic ideas formed from his early intercourse with external Nature.[3] After about a year's sojourn in London he once more set out for France, professedly with the intention of learning the French language, but evidently without any clearly defined purpose as to the course of

[1] See the lines beginning
Oft when the dazzling show, etc.
*Prelude*, Book iii.

[2] See lines beginning
A stripling scarcely of the household then
Of social life, etc.
*Prelude*, Book vi.

[3] See lines beginning
Oh blank confusion, etc.
*Prelude*, Book vii.

his future life. At Paris, where he stayed for a short time on his way to Orleans, he had glimpses of the chaos prevailing in the Legislative Assembly and in the club of the Jacobins. Arrived at Orleans he found himself perplexed by his want of insight into the political situation, but was drawn into a general kind of sympathy with the Republican cause, which was strengthened at Blois, whither he soon went, by companionship with Michael Beaupuy, an officer in the French Army, who, by abstract discussion, inoculated him with his own fervent Republican opinions. By this man his attention was first drawn to the wretched condition of the French peasantry, and he became confirmed in the belief that, with the overthrow of the existing *régime*,

> We should see the earth
> Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
> The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,
> All institutes for ever blotted out
> That legalised exclusion, empty pomp
> Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,
> Whether by edict of the one or few;
> And finally, as sum and crown of all,
> Should see the people having a strong hand
> In framing their own laws; whence better days
> To all mankind.[1]

To this Utopian view of human nature he seems to have been brought by the persuasions of Beaupuy, who also told him the rather commonplace story which he afterwards reproduced in verse, with the title of *Vaudracour and Julia*.

Fired by the abstract sentiments of his new political creed, Wordsworth became eager to translate it into action; but here he at once found himself in the presence of insuperable obstacles. In the first place, he was confronted with the September Massacres, a blood-thirsty comment on his theory of the instinctive benevolence of human nature. This, however, he easily encountered with the consideration that the massacres were the inevitable consequence of centuries of misrule; and he tells us that, on his return to Paris, he thought of allying

[1] *The Prelude*, Book ix.

himself with the Girondist party, in the hope (though he had but an imperfect command of the French language) of becoming one of its leaders. From this dream he was awakened by the refusal of his friends at home to continue his supplies, and he was thus forced to return to England. It is an interesting sign of character that, in his poetical autobiography, though he might as readily have versified such an experience as any of the others he records, he entirely suppresses it, representing his return home as having been caused solely by the difficulty he found in joining politicians with whom he was but imperfectly agreed. Still eager to fight in the cause of cosmopolitan Liberty, he discovered that in England a violent reaction had set in among the Whig party against the principles of the French Revolution. The execution of Louis XVI., following the September Massacres, alienated the sympathies of those who had, up to that point, approved the action of the Legislative Assembly, and their recantation was publicly made in a sermon by Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, who had already written to Talleyrand protesting against the trial of the King. This backsliding on the part of the Bishop inspired Wordsworth, a member of the same University and the same political party, to utter (in a letter which, however, he did not publish) a solemn counter-protest. Watson's pamphlet, as the work of a renegade, was sufficiently open to attack, and his critic had a simple task in exposing his inconsistency; but the advocacy of Wordsworth's own principles, which involved the abolition of hereditary titles, the Established Church, and corporate property, was not undertaken in a spirit likely to attract an audience enthralled by the glowing eloquence of Burke.

Shortly afterwards, Wordsworth's humanitarianism suffered a still severer shock from the declaration of war by England against France. Consistently with that air of somewhat doctrinaire self-satisfaction which pervades *The Prelude*, though his alienation from his old opinions was then complete, he casts the blame of them, not on his own inexperience, but on the policy of the English

Government. Even in 1805 he insists on regarding the question from an exclusively moral point of view, without taking into account the material forces which, in the actual world, cause wars between nations. Like Coleridge, he retained to the end a hatred of Pitt. Pitt, however, had acted as a statesman. So long as it was possible he adhered to his proclaimed principle of non-intervention; and it was only when the aggression of the French Jacobins on the Netherlands endangered alike the liberties of other countries and the national interests of England that he decided reluctantly to draw the sword.

The consequence of the declaration of war was to produce in the mind of Wordsworth a complicated moral crisis, from the conflict between his patriotism and his cosmopolitan aspirations. His vehement political creed cut him off from all opportunities of public action in England. For a work of philosophical poetry his genius was not sufficiently mature. He had indeed published, soon after his return to England in 1793, a little volume of poems entitled *An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches*, in which he attempted to carry out a resolution, formed when he was only fourteen years of age, to supply the observed deficiency in poetry of exact descriptions of external Nature;[1] but the publication was, he tells us, only intended to prove to his friends that he was capable of doing something in the way of literature. These poems showed, as was natural, many marks of youthful imitation. In the *Evening Walk*, which is dated "1787-8," there are evident recollections of *Windsor Forest*, *The Seasons*, *The Deserted Village*, and *The Task*. But in no English verse that had yet appeared had the representation of detail in landscape been so elaborate and minute: no poet had noted so keenly the effect on the imagination of the silent, mysterious movements of Nature, such as are recorded in the following description of the fading lights of evening:

> Now with religious awe the farewell light
> Blends with the solemn colouring of night;

[1] *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, by Canon Wordsworth, vol. i. p. 13.

Midst groves of clouds that crest the mountain's brow,
And round the west's proud lodge their shadows throw,
Like Una shining on her gloomy way,
The half-seen form of Twilight roams astray;
Shedding, through paly loop-holes mild and small,
Gleams that upon the lake's still bosom fall;
Soft o'er the surface creep those lustres pale,
Tracking the motions of the fitful gale.
With restless interchange at once the bright
Wins on the shade, the shade upon the light.
No favoured eye was e'er allowed to gaze
On lovelier spectacle in faery days;
When gentle spirits urged a sportive chase,
Brushing with lucid wands the water's face;
While music, stealing round the glimmering deeps,
Charmed the tall circle of enchanted steeps.
—The lights are vanished from the watery plains;
No wreck of all the pageantry remains.
Unheeded night has overcome the vales:
On the dark earth the weary vision fails;
The latest lingerer of the forest train,
The lone black fir, forsakes the faded plain;
Last evening sight, the cottage smoke, no more,
Lost in the thickened darkness, glimmers hoar;
And towering from the sullen dark-brown mere,
Like a black wall, the mountain-steeps appear.
—Now o'er the soothed accordant heart we feel
A sympathetic twilight slowly steal,
And ever, as we fondly muse, we find
The soft glow deepening on the tranquil mind.
Stay, pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay!
Ah no! as fades the vale they fade away:
Yet still the tender vacant gloom remains;
Still the cold cheek its shuddering tear retains.

The *Descriptive Sketches*, commemorative of Wordsworth's undergraduate trip to France and Switzerland, and dedicated to his companion, Robert Jones, are less remarkable than the *Evening Walk*, inasmuch as they necessarily reflect only the superficial impressions of a foreign landscape on a stranger's eye. Clearly modelled on Goldsmith's *Traveller*, the poems are at the same time full of touches characteristic of Wordsworth, and are interesting as a contemporary record of his feelings towards the French Revolution, more trustworthy perhaps as autobiography than his reproduction of them in *The*

*Prelude*, when revised in the light of memory and an altered judgment. The sympathetic heart and keen intelligence of Coleridge noted in the volume the advent of a new poet, superior in power to any of his contemporaries; otherwise it attracted little notice, and in Wordsworth the impulse to poetical composition was for a long time checked by the stress of political disappointment.

Enamoured as he was of a particular dream of Liberty, the course of events seemed everywhere to run counter to his hopes. France, which he had thought would be a single-hearted herald of the new faith, had sadly failed to fulfil his expectations. From his native country he was estranged, because she had actively opposed herself to his ideals. It became the more necessary for him to justify his theories to his own mind, and to explain their failure in the world by some system of philosophy, showing that the sound principles of the French Revolution had been blighted in their effect by radical disease in the constitution of society. Such a system he found prepared to his hand in William Godwin's *Inquiry into Political Justice.*

The fundamental principles of this book were in themselves merely a revival of the old doctrines of the Stoics, modified by the views of the French Encyclopaedists. Evil, in the opinion of the author, is the result of the aberration of human society from the paths of pure reason, under the misguidance of inveterate prejudices, themselves springing out of old institutions. These prejudices have in the course of ages come to be regarded as innate ideas in the mind. But the mind of each individual is at birth nothing more—so Godwin taught—than a blank sheet of paper, on which, without any free will in man, Nature writes her experiences, leaving them to be afterwards classified by memory and reason. Freedom consists in the unfettered exercise of reason, which, emancipated from prejudice, shows the individual how to act on each occasion as the nature of circumstances, measured by general utility, requires. That the world in general may arrive at the truth, it is necessary to sweep away existing social institutions as the source of prejudice, and to allow each

man, rising above patriotic sentiment and personal emotion, to view the world through the unclouded eye of reason.

To this abstract system of philosophy Wordsworth was attracted during the years 1793-96, while suffering from the state of disgust produced in him, on the one hand by the mad actions of the French Revolutionists, and on the other by the anti-French policy of the English Government. He lived while in London in the midst of a Godwinian circle. He gave a blind adherence to Godwin's necessarian doctrines. In poetry the sole fruits of his imagination (besides some unpublished satires, a kind of composition for which he had no talent) were the poem afterwards called *Guilt and Sorrow* and his so-called tragedy *The Borderers*. The latter was an attempt to mould the philosophy of Godwin into a poetical form, apparently, however, with a view of exposing the disastrous consequences of those principles in it which demanded the suppression of the natural instincts of love and pity. The action of the play—clearly suggested in the first place by *The Robbers* of Schiller—exhibits the wavering purpose of a benevolent but feeble youth,—captain of a band of outlaws, bound together by oath to remedy social injustice,—who, under the influence of a villain of powerful intellect, emancipated from all prejudice, perpetrates the death of an innocent old man. If Wordsworth's aim in *The Borderers* were indeed to discredit in part the moral teaching of Godwin, the artistic means that he took were ill suited for his purpose, since nothing could be proved from a story which offended against every rule of poetic probability. But whatever was his object in writing the play, we have his own confession in *The Prelude* that the opinions of Godwin were those by which he was inspired after the declaration of war with France:

> This was the time, when, all things tending fast
> To depravation, speculative schemes—
> That promised to abstract the hopes of Man
> Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
> For ever in a purer element—
> Found ready welcome. Tempting region *that*
> For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,

> Where passions had the privilege to work,
> And never hear the sound of their own names.
> But, speaking more in charity, the dream
> Flattered the young, pleased with extremes, nor least
> With that which makes our Reason's naked self
> The object of its fervour. What delight!
> How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
> To look through all the frailties of the world,
> And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
> Infirmities of nature, time, and place,
> Build social upon personal Liberty,
> Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
> Superior, magisterially adopts
> One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
> Upon an independent intellect.[1]

From the unpoetical region of Godwinian philosophy Wordsworth was brought back to his old feeling for Nature by the influence of his sister. Dorothy Wordsworth was rather more than a year younger than her brother William. She had shared the passionate delight he had experienced in his earliest impressions, and was convinced that it was his destiny to be a poet. But their companionship had been broken off when they were left orphans, and Dorothy had been removed to the house of an uncle, who so strongly disapproved of William's refusal to follow any regular profession and of his republican principles that, after 1790, he kept the brother and sister strictly apart. They met again at Halifax in 1794, and made a tour together into the Lake district. Wordsworth was at this time at the end of his resources, but in 1795 a small legacy, left him by a young friend, Raisley Calvert, enabled him to carry out a design, long cherished by himself and his sister, of living together in a cottage. They settled in a farm-house at Racedown in Dorsetshire, and occupied it for about two years, during which time Wordsworth gradually recovered the old impressions and sentiments of his boyhood. As he acknowledges in *The Prelude*, this restoration to mental health was mainly due to his sister. Dorothy, though without her brother's poetic imagination, had all his keen appreciation of the beauty of Nature, and an

[1] *The Prelude*, Book xi.

even finer faculty for observing the minute movements of its inner life. She had seen with regret William's deviation, from the poetical sphere which she rightly considered his own, into the paths of political and philosophical controversy, and she now exerted all the charm of their old relationship to revive in his imagination the power of childish influences. The numerous entries in her Journals, which furnished materials for her brother's versification, show how constant and how fruitful was the intercourse between the two minds.

At the same time this exclusive companionship between brother and sister was not without its drawbacks in respect of Wordsworth's practice of his art. He had almost from infancy begun to form his idea of poetry on an abstract principle of contemplation, based solely on his own individual experience, and he continued to pursue this line of thought without reference to that general course of action in English society which had been gradually evolved by centuries of civil and religious conflict. When he passed from Hawkshead to Cambridge, one of the chief intellectual centres of the Renaissance, he contented himself with contrasting advantageously the simple life of the Lake shepherds with the complex constitution of Academic order. The account that he gives of his residence in London shows that he viewed men and things there entirely on the surface, having no knowledge of the secret springs that were at work in the historic centre of English political action. It is not wonderful therefore that, during his stay in France, he should easily have surrendered his judgment to the cosmopolitan view of society presented to him by a Republican and disciple of Rousseau. His Godwinian creed was adopted on grounds equally unsocial in the usual sense of the word ; and when his belief in the new Stoicism also failed him, he formed for himself a philosophy of life which, though to some extent based on actual experience, was still completely abstract in principle. Seeing that it was impossible to exclude from any genuinely philosophical system the effects of imagination and emotion, he re-

constructed his idea of society on a study of the elementary instincts in the peasantry about him, thinking that thus he should be brought more nearly within sight of the energies of Nature uncorrupted by the false artifices of civilisation :

> When I began to inquire,
> To watch and question those I met, and speak
> Without reserve to them, the lonely roads
> Were open schools in which I daily read
> With most delight the passions of mankind,
> Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed ;
> There saw into the depth of human souls,
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To careless eyes. And—now convinced at heart
> How little these formalities, to which
> With overweening trust alone we give
> The name of Education, have to do
> With real feeling, and just sense ; how vain
> A correspondence with the talking world
> Proves to the most ; and called to make good search
> If man's estate, by doom of nature yoked
> With toil, be therefore yoked with ignorance ;
> If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,
> And intellectual strength so rare a boon—
> I prized such walks still more, for there I found
> Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace,
> And steadiness, and healing, and repose
> To every angry passion. There I heard,
> From mouths of men obscure and lowly, truths
> Replete with honour ; sounds in unison
> With loftiest promises of good and fair.[1]

All this might be well as a corrective to a mind misled by the doctrines of Godwin ; but to suppose that the passions of mankind, whose complex moods are displayed in such contrasted characters as Falstaff, Henry V., Iago, Hamlet, and Jaques, could be fully, or even accurately, studied within the narrow range of action to which persons like Goody Blake, Betty Foy, or Simon Lee are necessarily restricted, was to reconstruct the idea of society on a base entirely wanting in proportion.

Dorothy Wordsworth had not the qualifications for pointing out to her brother the perversities of his new creed. Her simple and earnest character had been

[1] *The Prelude*, Book xiii.

disturbed by none of the influences with which his had been overwhelmed; and though her soothing companionship was like balm to his wounded spirit, and her exquisite powers of observation stimulated his poetic energy, her admiration for his genius tended rather to flatter than to strengthen his judgment of his own productions. If his imagination was to be lifted into a loftier sphere, communication with a mind of superior philosophical power was urgently needed; and this necessary complement to his intellect was not furnished till, at some date in the autumn of 1796, he made acquaintance with Coleridge.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the twelfth and youngest son of John Coleridge, Vicar of Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire and head-master of the Grammar School in the town. He was born on the 21st of October 1772, and lost his father before he was nine years old. From his earliest childhood he had grown into habits of curious self-consciousness. "I had all the simplicity, all the docility of the little child," he says of himself, "but none of the child's habits. I never thought as a child—never had the language of a child."[1] This unnatural precocity turned his imagination over-early into a metaphysical channel. Soon after his father's death he received a presentation to Christ's Hospital, the head-master of which, James Bowyer or Boyer, an excellent scholar and strict disciplinarian, did much to habituate the boy's imagination to that critical sense of form and beauty for which he was afterwards distinguished.

Nevertheless, "at a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year," says he, "I had bewildered myself in metaphysics and in theological controversy. Nothing else pleased me. History and particular facts lost all interest in my mind. Poetry (though for a school-boy of that age I was above par in English versification, and had already produced two or three compositions which I may venture to say were somewhat above mediocrity, and which had gained me more credit than the sound good sense of my old master was at all pleased with)—poetry itself, yea, novels and romance, became insipid to me."[2]

[1] *Coleridge's Poems* (Dykes Campbell), p. xiii.
[2] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. i. chap. i.

Between his fifteenth and seventeenth year the well-known apostrophe of Charles Lamb seems to present the picture of his mental growth:

> How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold in thy deep and sweet intonations the mysteries of Iamblichus or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar, while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of *the inspired charity-boy*.[1]

Metaphysical speculation was followed by a period of poetry and love-making. To the former he was impelled by his admiration for the Sonnets of William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850), fourteen in number, the second edition of which was published when Coleridge was just seventeen; and so great was his enthusiasm for these compositions that he declares that he made forty copies of them for distribution to friends. They served as models for the sonnets which about the same time he began to write to Mary Evans, sister of one of his school-fellows, for whom he conceived a passion that ended in disappointment. On the 12th of January 1791 he obtained an Exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he matriculated on 26th March 1792; becoming a Foundation Scholar of the College on the 5th of June 1794. After winning in 1792 the Browne Gold Medal for a Greek Sapphic Ode on the Slave Trade, and being one of four selected from the University in the same year to compete for the Craven Scholarship, he suddenly disappeared from Cambridge, and, under the name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbach, enlisted on the 2nd of December 1793 in the King's Regiment of Light Dragoons. This action seems to have been the result of momentary impulse, occasioned partly by money embarrassments, partly by disappointment in love. Finding himself entirely unfitted for a soldier's life he disclosed his real name, and through the help of his

[1] *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago.*

brothers procured a discharge on the 2nd of April 1794, after which he almost at once returned to Cambridge. But it is evident that his views were at this stage thoroughly unsettled. As early as May 1793 he had made himself conspicuous by his sympathy for William Frend, a Fellow of Jesus College, when the latter was being tried in the Vice-Chancellor's Court for propagating heterodox opinions in politics and religion, and on the 12th of June 1794 he paid a visit to an old school-fellow at University College, Oxford, obviously with a view of disseminating his revolutionary opinions among the undergraduates. It was on this occasion that he made the acquaintance of one who was afterwards closely connected with him both by family relationship and literary sympathy.

Robert Southey was born at Bristol on the 12th of August 1774. His father, a linen-draper in the city, failed in business, and from his third year the boy was taken under the charge of his mother's half-sister, by whom he was sent in 1788 to Westminster School. Thence he was expelled in 1792 for writing an essay against flogging, in which he reflected on the injustice of his schoolmaster. He matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, on the 3rd of November 1792, after having been refused admission to Christ Church in consequence of his expulsion from Westminster. His college tutor left him to his own devices, and these led him into all kinds of miscellaneous reading, so that, when he first fell in with Coleridge, his mind was in a fluctuating state that laid it completely open to the captivating talk of his visitor. Then was first broached the scheme of Pantisocracy afterwards described both by Southey and Coleridge to their common friend, Thomas Poole. Twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles were to embark with twelve ladies, fixing themselves in some delightful part of the backwoods of America. The men were to support the community by labouring for two or three hours a day, the rest of the time being devoted to study and discussion. The women were to have charge of the

children, but not to neglect the cultivation of their minds. Whether marriage should be permanent or dissoluble was not finally decided ; but every one was to be left at liberty in respect of his political and religious opinions, so long as these did not interfere with the fundamental rules of the community.[1] It was calculated that the scheme might be initiated when each of the twelve gentlemen had produced £125. Coleridge hoped to raise his own contribution to the enterprise by his *Specimens of the Modern Latin Poets* for which he was then collecting subscribers, but which, like most of his other projects, never came to the birth. After a tour in Wales with a college friend, he joined Southey in Bristol and became engaged to Sarah Fricker, to whose younger sister, Edith, Southey was already affianced. The engagement on Coleridge's part seems to have been one of his many hasty impulses : at any rate it is evident from two letters to Mary Evans, written towards the close of 1794, that his heart was with the latter. At Bristol Coleridge contributed the first Act to *The Fall of Robespierre*, a tragedy projected by Southey, himself, and their future brother-in-law, Lovell. He then set out, taking with him the MS. for London, where he hoped to find a publisher for the play, as well as recruits for the scheme of Pantisocracy. From London he presently returned to Cambridge, and there resided through the Michaelmas term, but at the close of it finally quitted his University without taking a degree. His departure was doubtless due to his disappointment in love, for he went back to London, and remained there till January 1795 in the company of Charles Lamb, to whom he confided his feelings at this period.

As nothing had for a long time been heard of him by his friends in the West, Southey, fearing that he would not keep his promise to Miss Fricker, came to London in search of him, and carried him off when found to Bristol, where he himself was endeavouring to gain a living by his pen, having been turned out of doors by his aunt, who disapproved equally of his marriage engagement and of

[1] *Thomas Poole and his Friends*, by Mrs. Sandford, vol. i. p. 97.

his republican schemes. The two poets lived together for a while on a common fund, obtained partly by lecturing, partly by journalism, and partly by an advance from Joseph Cottle, a publisher in the city, who saw in their talents a source of future profit. With characteristic impetuosity, Coleridge, on the strength of the encouragement received from this publisher, determined to take the irrevocable step of marriage, though, scarcely a year before, the cessation of all correspondence with Sarah Fricker and his letters to Mary Evans show that the feelings under which he had contracted his engagement with the former had faded almost as completely as his interest in Pantisocracy. Companionship with Southey revived both enthusiasms: he discoursed eloquently on the pantisocratic ideal, and on the 4th of October 1795 was married in the church of St. Mary Redcliffe. Southey, in the meantime, had had an offer, from one of his uncles, of employment at Lisbon, and though before he set sail for that city in the winter he was secretly married to Edith Fricker, he told Coleridge that, as far as he was concerned, Pantisocracy must be abandoned. A quarrel between the two poets ensued, and their friendship was never cordially renewed.

For about a year after his marriage Coleridge endeavoured to embody in action the numerous projects, social, religious, and political, with which his imagination was teeming. He took a small cottage at Clevedon, where he himself, his wife, one of her sisters, and one of his friends, lived on more or less pantisocratic principles. From this residence, however, finding it to be too far from a library, he soon removed to Bristol. A vehement supporter at this time of revolutionary doctrines, he attempted to propagate them, first by fierce attacks on the English Ministry, and afterwards by founding a periodical called *The Watchman*, the rise and fall of which he humorously describes in *Biographia Literaria*. He received an offer of the co-editorship of the *Morning Chronicle*, but the negotiations came to nothing, as did others of a different kind with a Mrs. Evans of Darley Abbey, near Derby, who

wished him to undertake the education of her sons. On the other hand, the magic of his eloquence attracted to him many new friends. Among them were Thomas Poole, a rich farmer of Somersetshire; Thelwall, the political agitator; and Charles Lloyd, a young man with poetical aspirations, the son of a Birmingham banker, who was so much enamoured of his conversation that he asked to be allowed to be received into his family. Consent to this latter arrangement was given almost at the same time that Coleridge received news of the birth of his eldest son, named Hartley after the philosopher whom he then chiefly admired. Scarcely had Lloyd joined the household when he exhibited tendencies to epilepsy; and, under pressure of this trouble and of financial straits, Coleridge migrated to a cottage at Nether Stowey, hoping to receive there consolation and encouragement from the companionship of Poole. Earlier in this year —1796—he had published through Cottle a volume of *Poems on Various Subjects*, reflecting in a vivid manner the shifting hues of his many-coloured imagination. Nothing can better suggest the character of these poems than his description of his own mind and habits at this period.

"I am, and ever have been," he writes to Thelwall, "a great reader, and have read almost everything. . . . I am *deep* in all out-of-the-way books, whether of the monkish times or of the puritanical era. I have read and digested most of the historic writers, but I do not *like* history. Metaphysics and poetry and 'facts of the mind' (*i.e.* accounts of all strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers, from Theuth the Egyptian to Taylor the English pagan) are my darling studies. In short, I seldom read except to amuse myself, and I am almost always reading. Of useful knowledge—I am a so-so chemist, and I love chemistry—all else is blank—but I will be (please God) an horticulturist and farmer. I compose very little, and I absolutely hate composition. Such is my dislike that even a sense of duty is sometimes too weak to overpower it. . . . As to my own poetry, I do confess that it frequently, both in thought and language, deviates from 'nature and simplicity' . . . it seldom exhibits unmixed and simple tenderness or passion; my philosophical opinions are blended with or deduced

from my feelings, and this, I think, peculiarises my style of writing, and like everything else it is sometimes a beauty and sometimes a fault.[1]"

From what has been said it will readily be seen that two men so variously gifted as Wordsworth and Coleridge, sharing so many common perceptions, but of such different capacities, were certain when brought into daily companionship to be reciprocally stimulated by each other. Both from very early years were unconsciously educating themselves on semi-Godwinian principles, their ideal being to "build social upon personal liberty." By "personal liberty" each meant the power of freely translating into action the teaching of what they termed "Nature," and by "social liberty" the opportunity of persuading others to follow their example, destroying in the process the fetters of "prejudice," as they called it; in other words, the doctrines derived from custom and old institutions. By "Nature" they meant the most fundamental thoughts and feelings that they could discover by introspection in their own minds. To Wordsworth Nature signified the mysterious intuitions, amounting to moral convictions, experienced by him in his solitary reveries among his native lakes and mountains, feelings which he desired to mould into philosophic form. Persistent as he was in this purpose, the stubborn soil of his understanding did not prove immediately fruitful: his methods of reasoning were crude; his intellectual experience narrow; and he had been led away by political excitements from the contemplative quietism to which he was naturally inclined. Coleridge, on the contrary, found the prompting of Nature in the lightning impulses of his own intelligence. He was "of imagination all compact"—imagination that bore him with equal swiftness into the spheres of creative poetry or of philosophical analysis, and he had all the improviser's facility of expression. From his youth he was haunted by an ambition to build up a scheme of absolute philosophy on the basis of revealed religion, and in pursuit of

[1] *Coleridge's Poems* (edited by T. Dykes Campbell), p. xxix.

his ideal he passed with a marvellous power of apprehension from one system of metaphysics to another of the most opposite kind, now assimilating the ideas of Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists, now those of Spinoza and even of Jacob Böhme, and thence again darting off to Hartley and the modern materialists, fascinated by all speculations, satisfied with none. Intensely religious in his perceptions, and of a most sensitive conscience, he was incapable, through want of resolution and will, of carrying his moral ideas into action. Of his philosophical and poetical designs it may truly be said—in the language employed by Shakespeare to describe the course of true love :

> If there were a sympathy in choice,
> War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
> Making it momentany as a sound,
> Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
> Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
> That, in a spleen unfolds both heaven and earth,
> And ere a man hath power to say, Behold !
> The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
> So quick bright things come to confusion.

In their passion for "personal" and "social liberty" both Wordsworth and Coleridge, before becoming acquainted with each other, had hailed with enthusiasm the cosmopolitan movement of the French Revolution, hoping that the destruction of prejudice which this involved would be succeeded by their own ideal visions of Nature and human society. They were soon taught by the actual course of events that Revolution meant something very different from their hopes ; but experience, far from changing their opinions, only produced in their minds a state of conflict, the instinct of patriotism being suppressed by pique at the consciousness of personal error, and the sense of reality dimmed by political partisanship. Wordsworth, under the influence of disappointment, had withdrawn himself almost completely from the sphere of action, but Coleridge, as late as 1797, was still endeavouring to satisfy his conceptions of revolutionary "liberty" by savage attacks on the anti-French policy

of the English Ministry, particularly on the character of Pitt.

When the two poets were brought together by the settlement of Wordsworth and his sister at Alfoxden in the neighbourhood of Nether Stowey, each was able to contribute something essential towards that philosophy of life which both desired to make the groundwork of social action. Wordsworth brought the mystical inspiration derived from Nature, and the conviction of the moral obligations involved in it, both of which were needed to steady the versatile imagination of Coleridge: the latter, on his side, furnished the comprehensive view, the forming intelligence, the artistic sense, necessary to reduce the metaphysical materials to a theoretic system. The result of daily walks and conversations was the philosophic scheme of poetry embodied in *Lyrical Ballads*, and described by Coleridge in a well-known passage of his *Biographia Literaria*:

> The thought suggested itself—to which of us I do not recollect—that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them where they present themselves.[1]

These words were written some years after the first publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, when Coleridge was in a mood more fitted to criticise judicially the artistic merits of the scheme. On first coming under the influence of Wordsworth, he prostrated himself with characteristic impulsiveness before the other's genius in an attitude of almost Oriental adoration. Wordsworth,

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, (1907), vol. ii. p. 1.

he wrote to Southey, was the greatest man he had ever met. If some of his own enthusiastic admirers, Thomas Poole or Charles Lamb, questioned the grounds of his rather servile admiration for the elder poet, he insisted that their hesitation to follow his example was due to their own insensibility. To William Godwin he wrote:

> If I die and the booksellers make you any offer for writing my life do not fail to say: Wordsworth descended upon him like the Γνῶθι σεαυτόν from heaven, and by showing him what true poetry was, made him know that he himself was not a poet.

Wordsworth's doctrine of the ethical influence of Nature came, in fact, like a revelation to Coleridge's ardent and agitated mind; and the subsidence of political passion in poems like *Frost at Midnight* and *The Nightingale* shows the soothing effect on his imagination of his friend's philosophy. Like Wordsworth, he resigned himself after the disenchantment produced by the French invasion of Switzerland to look for Liberty only in the free communion between Nature and the mind of man:

> The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
> They burst their manacles and wear the name
> Of Freedom, graven on a heavier chain!
> O Liberty! with profitless endeavour
> Have I pursued thee, many a weary hour;
> But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever
> Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human power.
> Alike from all, howe'er they praise thee,
> (Nor prayer, nor boastful name delays thee)
> Alike from Priestcraft's harpy minions,
> And factious Blasphemy's obscener slaves,
> Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,
> The guide of homeless winds, and playmate of the waves!
> And there I felt thee!—on that sea-cliff's verge,
> Whose pines, scarce travelled by the breeze above,
> Had made one murmur with the distant surge!
> Yes, while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
> And shot my being through earth, sea and air,
> Possessing all things with intensest love,
> O Liberty! my spirit felt thee there.[1]

[1] *Coleridge's Poems* (Dykes Campbell), p. 126, "France."

The unqualified submission of a genius such as that of Coleridge to his own could hardly fail to confirm Wordsworth's confidence in the inspired source of his poetical mission. From the public *Lyrical Ballads* met with a somewhat mixed reception. The taste of the general reader had been to a certain extent prepared to welcome poems of extreme simplicity, so that even compositions like *The Idiot Boy* found critical admirers; but Southey (whose opinion of the volume was unfavourable) stood alone in recognising the grandeur of the lines *Written above Tintern Abbey*, and neither he nor any of the other public critics could see poetical merit in the most remarkable piece in the collection, *The Ancient Mariner*. The sale of the *Ballads* was small, but Wordsworth, undismayed by the want of public appreciation, proceeded in 1800 to issue a new edition, in which he not only inserted a considerable number of new poems illustrative of his own theory of the art, but fortified this by an elaborate Preface. It is here that the influence of Coleridge on his intellect is first made apparent; for no one, who compares the cumbrous sentences, in which Wordsworth describes the general character of the Poet, with the brilliant criticism to the same effect in *Biographia Literaria*, will doubt that, in the former, the apologist (as in his later essays on the distinction between Imagination and Fancy) is assaying the metaphysical armour he has borrowed from his friend.

The full fruits of the poetical partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Coleridge and Southey, may be said to have matured themselves during the Napoleonic wars. Almost every characteristic poem of Wordsworth was either published or written before the battle of Waterloo: in the poetry of Coleridge the inspiring impulse had ceased long before that date, though *Christabel, Kubla Khan*, and *The Pains of Sleep* were not published till 1816: Southey after the appearance of *Roderick* almost abandoned verse composition. For a biographical view of the Lake School therefore it is only necessary to sketch briefly the nature of the relationship between the three poets from the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* till their several deaths.

Wordsworth's poetical development, during his period of active inspiration, proceeded in a steady course from the philosophical basis agreed upon in the conversations at Nether Stowey. *Peter Bell* was written in 1798. *The Prelude*, conceived with Coleridge's enthusiastic approval in the same year, was completed in 1805. In 1807 was published a volume of collected poems containing among others the grand Ode on the *Intimations of Immortality*, the *Ode to Duty*, the fine series of Sonnets dedicated to *National Independence and Liberty*, and the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*. In the same volume with *The Excursion*, published in 1814, was included *Laodamia*. *The Waggoner*, though it did not appear in print till 1819, had been written as early as 1805. To complete the plan of *The Recluse*, as designed at Nether Stowey, a third section was, according to Wordsworth, still wanting; but this was never brought into existence. His last thirty years bore no poetical fruits beyond a certain number of sonnets, *e.g.* those on *The River Duddon*, *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and others suggested during tours on the Continent and in Scotland. From Coleridge, through force of circumstances, after their association at Nether Stowey, he drifted apart gradually but widely. Starting together at the end of 1798 on a tour to Germany, for the purpose of learning the language and studying natural science, they soon separated, and Wordsworth with his sister returned in a short time to England, to settle in December 1799 at Dove Cottage, Townend, near Grasmere, which they occupied till 1808, removing from it into the parsonage at Grasmere, and thence again, in 1813, to Rydal Mount, where Wordsworth spent the remainder of his long and peaceful life. He married in 1802 Mary Hutchinson, his old school-fellow and his sister's great friend. Until his last years, in spite of his growing reputation, he made scarcely any profits from his poetry; but the assistance of friends and admirers, joined to his own economical habits, gave him a sufficiency till 1813, when, through the influence of Lord Lonsdale, he obtained the appointment of Distributor of Stamps for the

County of Westmorland, and with it a position of ease and relative affluence. In 1843 he was appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Southey, and in that capacity wrote in 1847 one official Ode on the Installation of the Prince Consort as Chancellor of the University. He died on the 23rd of April 1850, and was buried in Grasmere Churchyard.

More varied and tragic was the history of Coleridge, on whose versatile imagination and weak will the philosophical resolution formed at Nether Stowey exerted only a passing influence. After parting from the Wordsworths in Germany he exhibited a brief spell of courageous intellectual effort. He mastered the German language, studied German metaphysics, and on his return to England in the autumn of 1799, besides writing vigorously on politics in the *Morning Chronicle*, actually completed a fine translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*. But different causes soon threw him back into barren indolence. To be near the Wordsworths he removed his home from Nether Stowey to Greta Hall, Keswick, where, in 1802, during a brief fit of inspiration, he composed the second part of *Christabel*, the first having been completed at Nether Stowey in 1797. Unfortunately the moral influence of his friends was insufficient to sustain his mental energy. Years before, yielding to a momentary impulse, he had sought to escape from physical pain by the use of laudanum, and he had now acquired the habit of eating opium in the hope of deadening the violent attacks of rheumatism to which he was subject. At the same time the consequences of an impulsive and ill-assorted marriage became fully visible. Mrs. Coleridge was not qualified by sympathy to be his intellectual companion, and perpetual disagreements between husband and wife made his home almost unbearable to him. The sense of his own moral deterioration, always pressing on his sensitive conscience, combined with the physical pains caused by the use of the drug, gradually destroyed his powers of poetical creation. Read in the light of these facts, nothing can be more pathetic than the comparison

of the following stanzas from *Dejection* (written in 1802, and originally addressed to Wordsworth) with the last stanza of *France*, composed while he was still in the first glow of enthusiasm aroused in him by Wordsworth's revelation to him of the healing powers of Nature:

II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief,
Which finds no nat'ral outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—
O EDMUND! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the Western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow-green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them, or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimm'd, but always seen;
Yon crescent moon, as fix'd as if it grew,
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue,
A boat becalm'd, a lovely sky-canoe!
I see them all so excellently fair—
I *see*, not *feel*, how beautiful they are!

III

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail,
To lift the smoth'ring weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.[1]

To follow all the painful incidents in his life is unnecessary; and for the purposes of this history it is sufficient to note that after 1804 he began a period of fitful wandering, with short visits at intervals to his home at Greta Hall; that in 1808 he projected a weekly periodical, *The Friend*, which, after having been launched

[1] *Coleridge's Poetical Works* (Dykes Campbell), p. 522.

on 1st June 1809, was carried on very irregularly till the twenty-seventh number on 15th March 1810, when, like *The Watchman*, it ceased to appear; and that, in October of the same year, there was a rupture of the friendship with the Wordsworths, which—though a formal reconciliation was effected in 1812—was never resumed on the old footing. In January 1813 his tragedy of *Remorse*, which, under the name of *Osorio*, had been written at Nether Stowey as early as 1797, was acted at Drury Lane, and, being successful, ran for twenty nights. The years from 1813 to 1816 were spent mainly at Bristol and Calne, being occupied fitfully with lectures, journalism, and projects of philosophy. He wrote also his *Biographia Literaria* and made a collection of his poems with the title *Sibylline Leaves* (not published till 1817), while, at the suggestion of Byron, he composed another play called *Zapolya*, which was offered to the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, but was not accepted. Byron also induced Murray to undertake the publication of *Christabel*, which, with *Kubla Khan* and *The Pains of Sleep*, appeared in pamphlet form in 1816. Almost at the same time Coleridge put himself into the hands of Mr. Gillman, an apothecary of Highgate, to whose watchful care was due the comparative repose of his later years. His health improved and his tranquillity of mind increased, but his faculty of imaginative creation, almost of literary production, was extinct. He still talked in such a way as to leave on all who heard him—among others, Irving and Carlyle—a sense of his inspiration. At times he lectured with more or less success, and he was as full as ever of great philosophical projects. But there was no performance, and the picture of his life in 1821 cannot be more vividly painted than in the *resumé* of his own words, given by his best biographer, Mr. Dykes Campbell:

> He has nothing actually ready for the booksellers, but he has four works so near completion that he has "literally nothing more to do than to *transcribe*." The transcription, however, can only be done by his own hand, for the material exists in "scraps and *Sibylline* leaves, including margins of books and blank pages." Then, he owes money "to those who will not exact it, yet who

need its payment"; and, besides, he is far behindhand in the settlement of his accounts for board and lodging. These pressing needs compel him "to abrogate the name of philosopher and poet, and scribble as fast as he can, for *Blackwood's Magazine*," or (as he has been employed for the last days) "in writing MS. sermons for lazy clergymen, who stipulate that the composition must not be more than respectable, for fear they should be desired to publish the visitation Sermon." "This I have not yet had the courage to do. My soul sickens and my heart sinks." "Of my poetic works, I would fain finish the *Christabel*. Alas! for the proud time when I planned, when I had present to my mind, the materials as well as the scheme of the Hymns entitled Spirit, Sun, Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Man, and the Epic poem on—what still appears to me the one only fit subject remaining for an Epic poem—Jerusalem besieged and destroyed by Titus."[1]

The only other considerable works that he produced were both in prose—*Aids to Reflection*, published in 1825, and a pamphlet on the *Constitution of the Church and State, according to the ideas of each*, published in 1827. He had the sorrow to see his own weakness of will reproduced in his son Hartley, who, with something of his father's genius, inherited also habits of intemperance, which, in 1820, caused him to be deprived of a Fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford, gained in the previous year. With the exception of one or two lapses Coleridge's own tendencies in this direction seem to have been successfully checked during his residence at Highgate, and his closing years were calm and peaceful. In 1825 he received from George IV. an annuity of £100 as one of the associates of the newly founded Royal Society of Literature, and though this was discontinued by William IV., the loss was made good to him by Hookham Frere, a bounty of £300 being also granted him by the Treasury in 1831. He died on the 25th of July 1834, and was buried in Highgate Churchyard.

In remarkable contrast with the vacillations of Coleridge stand the character and career of his brother-in-law. Southey's mind was essentially practical. Hence, though in his youth he was perhaps more in active sympathy

[1] *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Edited by James Dykes Campbell.* Introduction, cix.

than either Wordsworth or Coleridge with revolutionary schemes, he was the first to retire from them when he perceived their real meaning. His early marriage imposed on him the necessity of earning a regular livelihood; and unable to reconcile himself to the requirements of the clerical, the medical, or the legal professions, after a brief experience of all three, he resolutely determined to support himself by literature. With this end in view, he sought to turn his ingenuity and acquired learning to the most lucrative account, and made money in any way that he could by writing for booksellers and periodicals. His poems, being less revolutionary in style than those of Coleridge and Wordsworth, obtained a wider popularity, but his main profits came from the prose writings which, in the shape of histories or miscellaneous essays, his well-stored mind was able to produce with speed and abundance. In 1803 the support of Coleridge's family as well as his own came to depend on the labours of his pen, nor did he ever flinch in the face of his double task. Removing in that year to Greta Hall, where his brother-in-law had settled himself, he devoted his time, with an almost mechanical regularity, to the production of books, pamphlets, and magazine articles. As he had long detached himself from his youthful Revolutionary sympathies, he made himself so useful to the Government as to earn in 1806 a pension of £160 a year. In 1808 his position as a leading writer on the Tory side was emphasised by his engagement with the recently founded *Quarterly Review*, his connection with which was steadily maintained till 1839. In 1813 he was appointed to the Laureateship, after it had been declined by Scott, and the somewhat servile character of his utterances in this capacity not unnaturally provoked comments from the Opposition. On the death of George III. he published his *Vision of Judgment*, in the preface to which he made severe reflections on what he called the "Satanic school of poetry," represented by Byron and Shelley, thus laying himself open to the retaliation of the former of these poets in his famous satire of the same name, and to other reflections on his

political apostasy, which had become notorious by the illicit publication in 1817 of his youthful drama, *Wat Tyler*. Southey replied to his assailants, but not very successfully ; and from that time forwards he almost entirely abandoned verse composition. In 1839, after the death of his first wife, he married Caroline Bowles, with whom he had long maintained an epistolary correspondence ; but his brain had been worn out by its excessive labours, and he died on the 23rd of March 1843, and was buried in Crosthwaite Churchyard. His chief poems were published in the following order : *Joan of Arc*, 1796 ; *Thalaba*, 1801 ; *Madoc*, 1805; *The Curse of Kehama*, 1810; *Roderick*, 1814 ; *Wat Tyler* (surreptitiously), 1817.

These biographical details will help to illustrate the mental processes by which each of the Lake poets formed the character of his metrical compositions. But to obtain a complete view of their influence on the course of English Literature, it is necessary to understand the nature, first, of their relation to the national taste of their era, and then of the general bearing on the art of poetry of their philosophical theories.

Up to the close of the eighteenth century, the course of English Poetry, like that of classical poetry, had been a mirror to what Shakespeare calls " the age and body of the time." The effect of the poetical revolution accomplished by Wordsworth and Coleridge was to remove the sphere of poetry from social action to philosophical reflection, and to exchange the ancient method consisting in the ideal imitation of external objects for an introspective analysis of the impressions of the individual mind. The monuments of this great change can be best studied in the poetry of Wordsworth, but the nature of the change itself and its effects on poetry as an art will be more clearly understood by reference to the criticism of Coleridge.

Coleridge, endowed by nature with the finest faculty of artistic perception, had the further advantage of learning the art of criticism from one who had a perfect understanding of the true uses of classical education. No passages

in his *Biographia Literaria* are more interesting than those in which he describes the method employed in teaching by James Bowyer, his old school-master at Christ's Hospital, whose practice was to make his pupils examine the composition of the best ancient authors, pointing out to them the principles on which it was superior to the work of poets like Ovid and Statius, and its fundamental resemblances to the style of such modern authors as Shakespeare and Milton. Disciplined in this manner, Coleridge soon learned to perceive the radical faults in the work of a poet like Darwin, whose *Botanic Garden*, on the eve of the French Revolution, was at the height of its popularity. But though his judgment had been trained to recognise instinctively the highest standard of æsthetic authority, his precocious metaphysical talent intervened to prevent him from discovering the causes of the vicious tendencies in the taste of his own age. Instead of asking himself whether the mechanical style of Darwin might not be historically traced to an abuse springing out of the decay of some sound hereditary principle, he erected an abstract standard of judgment whereby his own æsthetic dislikes and preferences might be justified on general grounds. Having, for example, conceived an enthusiastic admiration for the Sonnets of Bowles,

"It was my constant reply," he tells us, "to authorities brought against me from later poets of great name, that no authority could avail in opposition to Truth, Nature, Logic, and the laws of Universal Grammar; actuated too by my former passion for metaphysical investigations, I laboured at a solid foundation on which permanently to ground my opinions, in the component faculties of the human mind itself, and their comparative dignity and importance. According to the faculty or source, from which the pleasure given by any poem or passage was derived, I estimated the merit of such poem or passage."[1]

Not recognising that metaphysical principles formed at so immature an age were likely to prove at some point defective, Coleridge proceeded to apply them universally with all the enthusiasm of his impulsive nature. At the

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. i. p. 14.

same time he sought to ground his religious and political opinions on an equally abstract philosophical basis; as a natural consequence, his principles fluctuated in constant ebb and flow. Poetry, metaphysics, morals, and politics mixed themselves for ever in his imagination. His *Religious Musings* and his *Æolian Harp*, read together, show a mind alternating between Unitarianism and Pantheism; the former poem and the *Ode on the Departing Year* reflect the agitations of feeling distracted between disappointment with a Revolution strayed from its anticipated course, and anger at the armed resistance offered by the poet's own country to the aims of that Revolution. The first meeting with Wordsworth convinced Coleridge that, in the profound Nature-worship and the mystical experiences of his new acquaintance, he had at last discovered the "solid foundation" on which he might permanently build his philosophical belief; and the extravagant ardour with which he prostrated himself before the genius of his friend is merely the measure of a proselyte's enthusiasm for the supposed truths of a new revelation. It is evident that, when the scheme of *Lyrical Ballads* was first formed, Coleridge accepted without question all the fundamental principles of Wordsworth's practice, whether exemplified in poems like *Tintern Abbey* or in the class typified by *The Idiot Boy*. As he says in *Biographia Literaria*:

> During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination.[1]

Out of those conversations was evolved the theory of Poetical Creation, expounded in the Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), in the Preface to the edition of Wordsworth's Poems published in 1815, and in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. In this theory is to be found the basis of departure for the Revolutionary movement originated by the Lake School, as opposed to the

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 1.

Classical principles by which the Art of Poetry had been hitherto regulated.

Creation in Poetry, as conceived by Wordsworth and Coleridge, meant the revelation to the world, by the imagination of the poet, of the unseen life in Nature. The æsthetic problem to be solved was, according to them, primarily a metaphysical, not a technical question; not, What are the limits of the Art of Poetry? but, What is the Poet? and What are the functions of the Poet's imagination?

"My own conclusions, on the nature of poetry in the strictest sense of the word," writes Coleridge, "have been in part anticipated in some of the remarks on the Fancy and Imagination. What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with What is a poet?—that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind."[1]

The answer to Coleridge's latter question, which he himself does not make very clear, is supplied by Wordsworth:

Taking up the subject then upon general grounds, let us ask What is meant by the word Poet. What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself. And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man more pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings on of the Universe, and *habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.*[2]

To bring this impulse to effect is the work of the poet's imagination:

"The processes of Imagination," says Wordsworth, "are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence."[3]

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[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 12.
[2] Preface to 2nd edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).
[3] Preface to edition of *Collected Poems of Wordsworth* (1815).

And so Coleridge in his vein of German transcendentalism:

> The Imagination I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition, in the finite mind, of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[1]

The imaginative process thus defined is illustrated by what Wordsworth says in *The Prelude* of his early intercourse with Nature:

> A plastic power
> Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
> Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
> A local spirit of his own, at war
> With general tendency, but, for the most,
> Subservient strictly to external things
> With which it communed. An auxiliar light
> Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
> Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
> The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on,
> Murmuring so sweetly, in themselves obeyed
> A like dominion, and the midnight storm
> Grew darker in the presence of my eye.[2]

This power, he tells us, was long neutralised in him, by his political and social theorising, but in time

> I shook the habit off
> Entirely and for ever, and again
> In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
> A sensitive being, a *creative* soul.[3]

Evidently, then, up to the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, and for some time after, Wordsworth and Coleridge were agreed in regarding Poetry as a kind of philosophy, or

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, vol. i. pp. 297-98.
[2] *The Prelude*, Book ii. [3] *Ibid.* Book xii.

even a religion, the truths of which were revealed to the world by the imagination of the poet. Wordsworth, accepting with complacency the enthusiastic homage paid by Coleridge, both to his moral view of Nature and to his poetical genius, became more and more firmly convinced of the truth of his inspiration. But in Coleridge, as was usual with him, the believing mood gradually evaporated. His own incapacity to persevere in the path of austere morality prescribed by his master was accompanied (as he himself confesses in the poem called *Dejection*) by a fading sense of the religious truths revealed in Nature; and both poets became conscious of a growing estrangement in their intellectual sympathies, a feeling that was soon aggravated in Coleridge by what he considered personal grievance. While the perception of the change was recorded by Wordsworth in the lines entitled "A Complaint," Coleridge confided to pocket-books and other memoranda his doubts as to principles which he had in the first place accepted as infallible. Thus about the year 1805 he makes the following entry:

> The thinking disease is that in which the feelings, instead of embodying themselves in acts, ascend and become materials of general reasoning and intellectual pride. The dreadful consequences of this perversion may be instanced in Germany, *e.g.* in Fichte *versus* Kant, Schelling *v.* Fichte, and in Verbidigno [Wordsworth] *v.* S. T. C * * *. On such meagre diet as feelings, evaporated embryos in their progress to birth, no moral being ever becomes healthy.

And at a later date, alluding to the metaphysical aid given by himself to Wordsworth, he says:

> I have loved with enthusiastic self-oblivion those who have been well pleased that I should, year after year, flow with a hundred nameless rills into *their* main stream.

While the belief that poetry is a religious revelation of Nature weakened in Coleridge's mind, his critical sense of Wordsworth's defects in the practice of his *art* became more acute. The latter, with perfect logical consistency,

had deduced from his own principles certain practical conclusions. The ideas which he himself derived from his observation not only of clouds, trees, and mountains, but of the personal objects, men and women, whom he met in his solitary communings with Nature, became the exclusive matter of his imaginative thought, and—(pleased as he was "with his own passions and volitions, and rejoicing more than other men at the spirit of life that was in him") —furnished him on the slightest occasion with subjects for poetry. As he says:

> The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
> I shall not covet for my dower,
> If I along that lowly way
> With sympathetic heart may stray,
> And with a soul of power.[1]

On the same principle it followed that the reader's imagination must be content to pursue the line of abstract thought disclosed to him by the poet, without restricting the liberty of the poet by any conditions of its own. To the question of the reader of *Simon Lee*, for example, When was the tale to begin? the poet replies:

> O Reader, had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle Reader, you would find
> A tale in every thing.
> What more I have to say is short,
> And you must kindly take it:
> It is no tale; but *should you think*,
> Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

As regards expression, since poetry was primarily a philosophy, the end of which was the revelation of truth, it seemed to be a logical consequence, as Wordsworth argued, that "poetical diction" should follow the same analytical order as philosophical prose, metre being merely an addition to it for the purpose of making the style of the poet more agreeable.

Principles of this kind tended to revolutionise the

[1] *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*, "Peter Bell." Compare Tasso's views as to epic poetry, Vol. V. pp. 7-8.

whole practice of poetry. The first principle of poetry, as illustrated in the work of the great classical masters of the art, had been that the germs of poetical life and order exist in the poetical *subject*—the "res lecta potenter" of Horace—quite apart from the imagination of the poet. The wrath of Achilles was a fit subject of song independently of the particular manner in which it was treated in the *Iliad*: the general belief in Heaven and Hell, together with the reasoning of the Scholastic Doctors on the subject, preceded the composition of *The Divine Comedy*: the dramatic situations in the stories of Hamlet, King Lear, and Othello were in existence before Shakespeare used them for the purposes of tragedy. Matter of this kind had certain inherent qualities, rendering it more capable of rousing general emotion when expressed in verse than in prose; the disturbing nature of the emotion experienced exacted in the expression an order in the words different from that of prose and peculiar to the conditions of metre. The act of creation, as far as the poet was concerned, consisted in giving to the subject-matter the highest form it was capable of receiving; the final judgment as to the excellence and propriety of the form created by the poet—a matter that could only be determined by time—lay with the audience or the reader, as being the persons whom it was the aim of the poet to please. Wordsworth's reasoning, on the contrary, was an unconscious justification of the mystical eccentricity of Blake. To him the sole important matter in poetry was the vision in his own mind; and he considered that the poet had a right to be indignant with his readers if they did not see the vision as clearly as himself.

The critical attitude of Coleridge towards the classical principle, on the one hand, and towards Wordsworth's theory of poetry, on the other, as far as it is defined in his *Biographia Literaria*, is curiously inconsistent. Having come to perceive that poetry must be regarded rather as an art than as a philosophy, he recognised also that, as its aim was to produce pleasure in other minds besides that of the poet himself, there must be a pre-existing

idea of poetry in the imagination of the audience as well as in that of the poet.

"If," he says, "the definition sought for be that of a *legitimate* poem, I answer it must be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonising with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement." [1]

While the classical poets and critics taught that the metrical arrangement of words flowed naturally from the imagination of the poet, when rightly inspired by a subject capable of rousing the imagination of the reader, Wordsworth insisted that any subject might be made poetical by the imagination of the poet; and, at the time when *Lyrical Ballads* was published, Coleridge agreed with him in approving poems of the class of *Alice Fell*, *The Idiot Boy*, *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, *etc.* When, however, Wordsworth published the Preface in which he maintained that there was no essential difference between the *language* of poetry and prose, Coleridge at once parted company with him. Bowyer had taught him so truly to appreciate the manly spirit and character embodied in the work of the best classical poets, that he had early detected the false principles of the Darwinian school of poetry, which sought to disguise its lack of genuine inspiration by dressing up its diction in an artificial style intended to produce an appearance different from the language of prose. He could not fail to perceive, on the other hand, that the diction in a very large number of Wordsworth's poems was unsuitable to the requirements of metre; but, being prevented by his own reasoning from arguing that this fault was inseparably connected with a defective choice of subject, he fell back on the theory that metrical composition is dependent on abstract laws of its own. His examination of Wordsworth's poetical practice in the light of that poet's own principles is preceded by a metaphysical argument, in which he attempts to explain historically the contrast between the

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. i. p. 14.

style of European poetry at the period of the Classical Renaissance and the style of his own contemporaries.

"Christendom," he says, "from its first settlement on feudal rights has been so far one great body, however imperfectly organised, that a similar spirit will be found in each period to have been acting in all its members."[1]

If the meaning in this sentence were only what seems to be carried on the face of it—that the different countries of Christian Europe have been simultaneously stirred by great common movements, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Revolution—it might of course pass without question; such at least has been the principle on which the gradual evolution of English Poetry has been traced in this History. But Coleridge proceeds to show his real meaning to be, that the Renaissance produced *similar literary effects* at the same time in *all* European languages; that the same can be said of the literary phenomena produced by the French Revolution; and that the Renaissance style, common to all European literatures, stands in sharp contrast with the later European style common to them all at the era of the French Revolution. Neither of these propositions can, I think, be historically maintained. As to the Renaissance, Coleridge takes for his type of that style the poetry of Italy in the sixteenth century, which he exemplifies by a Madrigal of Giambattista Strozzi, and characterises as follows:

The imagery is almost always general: sun, moon, flowers, breezes, murmuring streams, warbling songsters, delicious shades, lovely damsels, cruel as fair, nymphs, naiads, and goddesses, are the materials which are common to all, and which each shaped and arranged according to his judgment or fancy, little solicitous to add or to particularise.[2]

Such indeed is an accurate description of most of the *Italian* poetry produced after the Council of Trent, and, as I have already shown, variously illustrated in the work of Marino, Chiabrera, and Testi.[3] But in what sense can

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 20.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 23.
[3] Vol. V. pp. 9-12.

the description be said to apply to *English* poetical work produced during the period defined by Coleridge, viz. "from the birth to the death of Shakespeare," a period which includes *The Faery Queen* and the finest productions of the Elizabethan drama? The character of English poetry during that epoch differs as totally from the style of the contemporary Italian poetry as the general life of a free though semi-barbarous nation differs from the manners of a people living in a state of refined servitude.

Nor can it be said that Coleridge's account of the general character of poetry in the age of the French Revolution is free from confusion. He says:

> In the present age the poet . . . seems to propose to himself as his main object, and as that which is the most characteristic of his art, new and striking images; with incidents that interest the affections or excite the curiosity. Both his characters and his descriptions he renders, as much as possible, specific and individual, even to a degree of portraiture.[1]

So far he would seem to be describing the poetry of Wordsworth, but he goes on:

> In his diction and metre, on the other hand, he is comparatively careless, and acknowledges no justifying principle but that of the writer's convenience; or else some mechanical movement is adopted, of which one couplet or stanza is so far an adequate specimen, as that the occasional differences appear evidently to arise from accident, or the qualities of the language itself, not from meditation and an intelligent purpose.[2]

Though it might be truly said that poets of the school of Wordsworth were "comparatively careless," and poets of Darwin's school were "mechanical," in their management of metre, nevertheless no illuminating conclusion could be reached by contrasting either of the mutually opposing English styles with the style of the Italian poets of the sixteenth century. On the contrary, it seems to be plain that, while the characteristics of the Darwinian style are in many respects identical with those of the late Italian poets as described by Coleridge himself—both of these being the products of the declining power of the Classical

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 21. [2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 21.

Renaissance—the individualism and careless composition, noted by him as features in the work of Wordsworth's disciples, are reflections of the anarchy of the French Revolution. Coleridge, however, thought that the qualities he admired in the classical style could be combined with the leading characteristics of the Wordsworthian manner:

"A lasting and enviable reputation," he says, "awaits that man of genius, who should attempt, and realise, a union;—who should recall the high finish, the appropriateness, the facility, the delicate proportion, and above all the perfusive and omnipresent grace, which have preserved, as in a shrine of precious amber, the Sparrow of Catullus, the Swallow, the Grasshopper, and all the other little loves of Anacreon; and which with bright though diminished glories, revisited the youth and early manhood of Christian Europe, in the vales of Arno and the groves of Isis and Cam;—and who with these should combine the keener interest, deeper pathos, manlier reflection, and the fresher and more various imagery, which give a value and a name that will not pass away to the poets who have done honour to our own times and to those of our predecessors."[1]

Wordsworth was so far impressed with Coleridge's reasoning on the character of his diction that, in the later editions of his poems, he made repeated efforts—as in *Beggars*, *Gipsies*, *The Highland Boy*, *etc.*—to remove the prosaic baldness of diction to which his friend called attention. Yet the general effect remains unaltered, and the unprejudiced reader who examines the poems of the *Alice Fell* class in their final shape will see that their prosaic character lies, not merely in the style of expression, but also in the mode of conception: it proceeds from that same analytic process of the Imagination which Wordsworth and Coleridge call poetic *creation*. For the effect of this is, that in the *poem*, where the reader desires to be carried out of himself into a perfectly ideal atmosphere, he can never get rid of the incongruous self-consciousness arising out of the didactic presence of the *poet*. Charles Lamb, in criticising to Wordsworth the second edition

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 24.

of *Lyrical Ballads*, lays his finger, with his usual acuteness, on the true nature of the artistic error, which Coleridge's metaphysics only served to obscure:

> I will just add that it appears to me a fault in the *Beggar* that the instructions conveyed in it are too direct, and like a lecture: *they don't slide into the mind of the reader while he is imagining no such matter.* An intelligent reader finds a sort of insult in being told, "I will teach you how to think upon this subject."[1]

In fact, those numerous poems of Wordsworth in which the dominant note appears to be the analysis of feeling by the poet himself, without the reader's co-operation, fail to satisfy Coleridge's excellent definition of a legitimate poem, viz.: "one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonising with and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."

This is the main point for consideration in the principle of the Revolution—for such it evidently is—in the art of Poetry, aimed at by the authors of *Lyrical Ballads*. In the Preface to the edition of his Poems of 1815, Wordsworth, after enumerating the faculties of the Poet, and repeating his theory as to the powers of Imagination and Fancy, recognised—as he had never done before—that the liberties of the Imagination were subject to certain Laws of Form.

> "The materials of Poetry," he says, "by these powers collected and produced are cast by means of various moulds into divers *forms*."

The moulds which he proceeds to enumerate are in fact no other than the well-known divisions of poetry, the Epic, the Dramatic, the Lyric, and the Idyllic and Didactic forms. Wordsworth attempted metrical composition on his own principles in all these varieties. He used the form of the drama in *The Borderers*, in order to give a poetic demonstration of the falsity of Godwin's moral teaching. But had this play been ever put upon the stage, the theatre would have emptied during the First

[1] *Letters of Charles Lamb* (Ainger), vol. i. p. 176.

Act; for the audience would not have endured to have the truth, as it appeared to the poet, revealed to them in a series of imaginary situations, remote from all probability, and by imaginary persons destitute of all human interest. The same principle applies to Wordsworth's use of the epic or narrative form of poetry. He lacked the power of conceiving ideal characters of such various types as Hamlet, Othello, and Henry V. The persons who appear in his poems all bear some relation to his own abstract way of thinking about Nature. The character of the Pedlar in *The Excursion* is a reflection of the poet's early character as described in *The Prelude*; that of the Solitary seems to be a vehicle for describing the spiritual experiences through which the author himself had passed. The Pastor, in the same poem, uses arguments to combat scepticism derived, as Wordsworth derived them, from the secret processes of Nature; the illustrations of character drawn from the churchyard in the mountains are all of the same limited kind as he had encountered in his walks about Racedown or Alfoxden. Hence the form of the epic, as used by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, is inseparably blended with, and indeed submerged by, the didactic form, and in neither composition is the element of action sufficiently extended or various to sustain the interest of the reader through a poem equalling in length the *Aeneid* or *Paradise Lost*. The self-conscious didactic element even mixes itself with his Idyllic style. In *Michael*, for example, we find the following passage:

> And grossly that man errs who should suppose
> That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
> Were things indifferent to the shepherd's thoughts.
> Fields where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
> The common air; hills which with vigorous step
> He had so often climbed; which had impressed
> So many incidents upon his mind
> Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
> Which, like a book, preserved the memory
> Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
> Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
> The certainty of honourable gain;

> Those fields, those hills—what could they less?—had laid
> Strong hold on his affections, *were to him*
> *A pleasurable feeling of blind love,*
> *The pleasure which there is in life itself.*

Why should the poet anticipate, and therefore rebuke, any question in the reader's mind about the truth of these influences? Is not the reason obviously because, in the character of his ideal Shepherd, Wordsworth is recalling and defending *his own* impressions of Nature?[1]

Self-consciousness dictates not only the range of feeling but also the mode of diction in those of his poems which have an epic or idyllic character. Coleridge, specifying the various classes of faults to be noted in Wordsworth's style, includes among them, very justly, what he calls "mental bombast, as distinguished from verbal," and illustrates his meaning by citing the poem entitled "Gipsies."[2] But he makes no mention of the *verbal* bombast to which, in the face of his own theory, Wordsworth is so often driven by the felt necessity of elevating descriptions of common things into accordance with the semi-Miltonic character of his metre. The incongruity of style, as is natural, most frequently makes itself felt in *The Prelude*, and may be exemplified from the narrative of his life in London:

> Add to these exhibitions, mute and still,
> Others of wider scope, where living men,
> Music, and shifting pantomimic scenes,
> Diversified the allurement. Need I fear
> To mention by its name, as in degree
> Lowest of these and humblest in attempt,
> Yet richly graced with honours of her own,

[1] Compare the lines in *The Excursion* describing the boyhood of the Pedlar, which are evidently a reflection of Wordsworth's own transports in the presence of Nature.

> His spirit drank
> The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
> All melted into him; they swallowed up
> His animal being; in them did he live,
> And by them did he live; they were his life.

See also *The Prelude*, Book i.: lines beginning "Ye Presences of Nature, etc."

[2] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. pp. 109-10.

> Half-rural Sadler's Wells? Though at that time
> Intolerant, as is the way of youth
> Unless itself be pleased, here more than once
> Taking my seat, I saw (nor blush to add,
> With ample recompense) giants and dwarfs,
> Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins,
> Amid the uproar of the rabblement,
> Perform their feats. Nor was it mean delight
> To watch crude Nature work in untaught minds;
> To note the laws and progress of belief;
> Though obstinate on this way, yet on that
> How willingly we travel, and how far!
> To have, for instance, brought upon the scene
> The champion, Jack the Giant-killer: Lo!
> He dons his coat of darkness; on the stage
> Walks, and achieves his wonders, from the eye
> Of living Mortal covert, "as the moon
> Hid in her vacant interlunar Cave."
> Delusion bold! and how can it be wrought?
> The garb he wears is black as death, the word
> "Invisible" flames forth upon his chest.[1]

When John Philips uses Miltonic rhythms to elevate the triviality of his theme in *The Splendid Shilling*, or when Cowper, in his description of the making of the cucumber frame, writes: "The stable yields a stercoraceous heap," the mock-heroic style serves the artistic purpose; but the same style, employed by a superior mind, self-consciously analysing its own impressions of the amusements of the vulgar (even granting the intention to be humorous), excites anything but pleasure.

It was in the Lyric class of poetry alone that a personality so intense as that of Wordsworth could find just scope for the purposes of creation; and, moving in this atmosphere, his genius has abundantly enriched the language with beautiful and characteristic works of metrical art. But the "creation" here was not of the kind contemplated in his Preface of 1800. On the contrary, it is particularly from poems deliberately composed on the principles there defined that Coleridge selects those examples of prosaic diction to which he takes exception. In *The Thorn*, *The Sailor's Mother*, *Resolution and Independence*, *The Idiot Boy*, *etc.*, the

[1] *The Prelude*, Book vii.

presence of the poet predominates over the form of the poem: he is felt to be endeavouring to teach the reader the inner meaning of common objects by the power of his own Imagination. He describes particular things, of which the reader knows nothing, with a minuteness which destroys all sense of unity and proportion. We are told what was the exact appearance of the Sailor's Mother and the old Leech-gatherer, and the precise words in which they answered the questions of the poet; how many yards the Thorn he describes is from the mountain path; and how many raps Betty Foy gave at the doctor's door. No known form of metrical composition is capable of idealising details of this kind: hence the effect produced is that of garrulous babble. But, in those of Wordsworth's lyrical poems on the beauty of which all are agreed, the personality of the poet is either entirely suppressed, or is so merged in the universality of the emotion to which he gives expression, as not to break in on the sense of metrical unity.

The large range of emotion which he is able to express poetically is seen in the variety of the metrical forms which he employs—the Ballad and octosyllabic metres; the Ode; and (above all) the Sonnet. The first class is of course employed as a vehicle for the simplest kind of feeling, and the most perfect example of it is the very beautiful *Lucy Gray*, which has all the tender charm of Blake's poem *The Little Girl Lost*[1] without its mystical extravagance. With it may be grouped those numerous short flights of song where expression is given to some simple feeling of the poet's own, which at once strikes a corresponding note in the hearts of his audience; for example, "She dwelt among untrodden ways," "My heart leaps up when I behold, etc.," "She was a phantom of delight," the *Ode to the Cuckoo*, *The Fountain*, *Yarrow Unvisited*, and many others, in none of which is there any didactic obtrusion of the poet's personality on the reader; in all of which, on the contrary, the parts of the poem "mutually support and explain each other;

[1] See ante, pp. 81-2.

all in their proportion harmonising with and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."

Higher in the poetic scale stands the Ode, the matter of which is of a more lofty and intellectual kind, involving spiritual perception and reflection, such as that contained in the famous *Ode on Immortality*, the *Ode to Duty*, the *Song in Brougham Castle*, or the beautiful address (1804) *To the Small Celandine*. There we find no attempt to alter the appearance of objects in the crucible of the poet's imagination, that faculty being rather employed to draw out thoughts which all can see to be inherent in the subject, and to embody them in metre of which the diction, at once severe, sublime, and accordant with tradition, illustrates the true spirit of classical poetry. A perfect example of this class is found in the verses to the Sky-lark, a composition of the most refined art, combining, perhaps beyond any English poem, the elegance of the Greek epigram with the purity of Christian sentiment:

> Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
> Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
> Or while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
> Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
> Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
> Those quivering wings composed, that music still!
>
> Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
> A privacy of glorious light is thine;
> Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
> Of harmony with instinct more divine;
> Type of the wise, who soar but never roam,
> True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

In this class, moreover, may be included those enthusiastic outbursts of admiration for the grander phenomena of Nature (resembling in character the lines on *Tintern Abbey*, or *Yew Trees*) which occur at intervals in *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, and which, being of a lyrical nature, and in no way an integral part of the narrative, can be easily detached from their prosaic context. Equally classical in conception and expression is the noble poem of *Laodamia*, which, imagined in a spirit completely opposed to that generally prevailing in *Lyrical*

*Ballads*, presents a style in direct antithesis to the rustic colloquialism prescribed in the Preface of 1800; witness the grand abruptness of the inversions in the opening lines:

> With sacrifice before the rising morn
> Vows have I made by fruitless hope inspired;
> And from the infernal Gods, 'mid shades forlorn
> Of night, my slaughtered lord have I required:
> Celestial pity I again implore;—
> Restore him to my sight—great Jove, restore.

But the class of lyric which probably most readily lent itself as an instrument to Wordsworth's genius was the Sonnet. Coleridge justly notes as a characteristic in his poetry, admitted even by hostile critics, "the sinewy strength of single lines and paragraphs." For this effect the structure of the sonnet was peculiarly well adapted, as being the most highly individualised of all metrical forms. Confined within a limit of fourteen lines, it admits of no superfluity, while at the same time the disposition of the rhymes allows much permutation and combination. Many generations of poets in all European countries have used it for various purposes, and, in its most conventional form, I have often had occasion to show how its amorous conceits reflect the decay of mediæval chivalry. But great representatives of the Classical Renaissance, Michael Angelo and Milton, had turned it to account for the expression of philosophical, religious, or political thought; and Wordsworth, following in their track, made it a vehicle for the still more complex moods,

> Produced as lonely Nature, or the strife
> That animates the scenes of public life,
> Inspired.

By composing on these lines he learned the true secret of that artistic self-restraint which, in *Lyrical Ballads* and the Preface of 1800, he seems to treat with scant respect:

> Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
> And hermits are contented with their cells;
> And students with their pensive citadels;
> Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
> Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
> High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
> Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:

> In truth the prison, unto which we doom
> Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me
> In sundry moods 'twas pastime to be bound
> Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
> Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
> *Who have felt the weight of too much liberty*,
> Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

The first fruit of his invention was the unrivalled Sonnet conceived on Westminster Bridge in 1802; and, having once realised his command over it, he made the sonnet his favourite form of metrical composition. Yielding indeed to the temptation of overvaluing his own thoughts, he too often employed the metre mechanically; and a more judicious selection of subject-matter would probably have reduced his two or three hundred sonnets to the same number as Milton's; but the quality of this residuum ranks with the work of the author of *Paradise Lost*. Of those that were inspired by "lonely Nature" the beauty may be measured by the comparatively little-known lines on the River Duddon, describing the changing moods of a mountain stream:

> The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
> Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
> Thy waters, Duddon! 'mid these flowery plains;
> The still repose, the liquid lapse serene,
> Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
> Had beautified Elysium! But these chains
> Will soon be broken; a rough course remains,
> Rough as the past; where Thou of placid mien,
> Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
> And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
> Shalt change thy temper; and, with many a shock,
> Given and received in mutual jeopardy,
> Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
> Tossing her frantic thyrsus wide and high!

The political and social Sonnets are for the most part inspired either by events of a nature fitted to strike the general imagination, such as "the extinction of the Venetian Republic," "the subjugation of Switzerland," "the fears of invasion," or by a sense of the evils produced in society through excessive luxury and selfishness, as in the lines beginning, "The world is too much with

us, etc.," and the series entitled "London 1802." Here though the poet occupies a pulpit—a place for which Wordsworth always seems to feel that he has a special call—he is well in touch with the conscience of his hearers, and the lofty rhetoric with which he seeks to move them is inspired by just principles of art.

Wordsworth's Sonnet is, as a rule, kept strictly within the traditional Italian lines. He avoids the three loose quatrains with the rhyming couplet at the close, used by the Elizabethan poets; and generally maintaining the compact rhyming structure of the first eight lines, finds his liberty in the distribution of the six closing ones. He is not careful to make a pause after the eighth line, but lets his thought run on, if necessary, to the end, trusting to one of those lines of "sinewy strength" which characterise his style and give the required effect both of emphasis and repose. A rhyming close is rarely found in his Sonnets.

Apart from his theory of the modifying power of Imagination, Coleridge's poetical genius moved in a sphere as different as possible from that of Wordsworth. When he was in health and spirits his mind, essentially active and (in the old sense of the word) creative, was always seeking to embody its impulses in some external form, whether this took the shape of a scheme of Pantisocracy, a metaphysical speculation, or an attack on the policy of the Government. He was never content with those moods of passive self-absorption, afterwards expressed in verse by an effort of introspective analysis, which Wordsworth describes in his poem called *Personal Talk*:

> Better than such discourse doth silence long,
> Long barren silence, square with my desire;
> To sit without emotion, hope, or aim,
> In the loved presence of my cottage-fire,
> And listen to the flapping of the flame,
> Or kettle whispering its faint undersong.

Hence, in the poetical partnership of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's business was of course to deal "with incidents

and agents that were to be in part at least supernatural"—the element of "the dragon's wing, the magic ring" that Wordsworth, in his own department, thought he could dispense with. Whatever effects of marvel and mystery could still be communicated to the reader, through the imagination of the poet, depended upon psychical experience; and within this region no man had ever higher qualifications to exercise poetical dominion than Coleridge. He was a dreamer of dreams, which had for him such vividness of reality, that the only necessity of art left for his invention was a form to serve as the channel of connection between the imaginations of himself and the reader.

The artistic difficulty lay in producing, out of such inward experiences, the sense of ideal unity; and once only in a long narrative poem did Coleridge succeed in discovering the poetical form necessary for this effect. But the fruit of that inspiration was *The Ancient Mariner*. In this wonderful poem the reader's imagination is carried into an ideal region where, nevertheless, all the incidents and feelings are so intensely realised that they never fail to seem natural. The foundation of it, we are told, was a dream of Coleridge's friend Cruikshank, in which he saw a ship navigated by dead men. To connect this with the idea of the living world a certain moral element was wanted; and this was suggested by Wordsworth, who had been reading Shelvocke's *Voyages*, in which is recorded the slaying of an Albatross. Into the groundwork suggested to him by his friend, Coleridge wrought a labyrinth of various images, derived some from picturesque appearances in natural objects—many of these observed by Dorothy Wordsworth—some from incidents recorded in books of travel, and some from his own fancy. All these materials are fused by imagination into a consistent whole, life being given to them by that magical, almost supernatural, music of metre of which Coleridge alone possessed the secret. The manner of the ballad style is adapted with admirable judgment to the character of the narrative. When *The Ancient Mariner* was first written, many obsolete words

and quaintnesses of spelling were introduced into it, obviously with a view of producing an antique effect; but these affectations were afterwards removed, without any injury to the general cast. It is indeed necessary for the reader who would thoroughly enjoy the poem to surrender his imagination absolutely to the guidance of the poet; and nothing testifies more clearly to the dominantly ethical tendency in taste through the eighteenth century than the reluctance of the critics to grant the poetical postulates of the author. Southey spoke of *The Ancient Mariner* as a poem aiming at a species of "Dutch sublimity." Wordsworth (who had at first intended to lend a hand to the composition, but soon found that it was quite out of his line) criticised it patronisingly on prosaic and rationalising principles, which mainly serve to bring into relief the radical differences in the genius of the two authors of *Lyrical Ballads*:

> The poem of my Friend has indeed great defects: first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being, who, having been long under the control of supernatural impressions, might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act but is continually acted upon; thirdly, that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated.

Coleridge condescended to the lack of sympathetic imagination in his audience so far as to style *The Ancient Mariner* in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* "a poetical reverie"; exciting thereby the just indignation of Charles Lamb, who, alone among the professional critics of the time, seems to have recognised the conditions under which the poem ought to be judged.

It fulfils indeed all those conditions of unity which Coleridge's definition requires in "a legitimate poem"; offering in this respect a striking contrast to *Christabel*, the only other extensive monument (for *Kubla Khan* is the merest fragment) of Coleridge's *creative* powers. He was always talking of his intention to complete *Christabel*,

and declared that, at the outset, he had the scheme of the entire poem in his imagination; the reader, however, may congratulate himself that he made no attempt to bring the story to a conclusion, since he could only have succeeded in destroying that very effect on which the beauty of the fragment depends. What explanation of the real nature of Geraldine would have satisfied expectant curiosity? How could any regular *dénouement* have been wrought out of "events which, having no necessary connection, do not produce each other"? The art of the poem—as in the parallel case of *Kubla Khan*—lies in the skill with which the sense of mystery in the action is associated with the picturesque distinctness of the imagery, and with the weird movement of the metre, suggesting to the imagination possibilities incapable of being definitely realised.

Who does not feel, in lines like the following, that Coleridge was haunted by images and rhythms that came into his mind, after the manner of dreams, from the memory of impressions he had derived from Nature, or else by ideas and phrases which stimulated his invention in the books that he read?

The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.

Or

There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Or

When the lady passed, there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;
And Christabel saw the lady's eye,
And nothing else saw she thereby,
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,
Which hung in a murky old niche of the wall.

Or

The chamber carved so curiously,
Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain,
For a lady's chamber meet:
The lamp with twofold silver chain
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

In effects like these we see the tendency in the art of poetry to approximate to the art of music; and this is indeed manifest in all the most characteristic poems of Coleridge. It appears equally in *The Sigh*, *The Circassian Love Chaunt*, *Moriens Superstiti*, *The Knight's Grave*, *The Pains of Sleep*, *Kubla Khan*, *Fire*, *Famine*, *and Slaughter*, and in those very characteristic, but less known, retrospective lines, written towards the reposeful close of his life, and called *Youth and Age*:

Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,
Where Hope clung feeding like a bee,
Both were mine! Life went a-maying
With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,
When I was young!

*When* I was young?—Ah woful *When*,
Ah! for the change 'twixt Now and Then!
This breathing house not built with hands,
This body that does me grievous wrong,
O'er aery cliff and glittering sands
How lightly *then* it flashed along:—
Like those trim skiffs unknown of yore,
On winding lakes and rivers wide,
That ask no aid of sail or oar,
That fear no spite of wind or tide!'
Nought cared this body for wind or weather,
When Youth and I lived in't together.

Flowers are lovely; Love is flower-like;
Friendship is a sheltering tree;
O! the joys that came down shower-like,
Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,
Ere I was old!

*Ere* I was old? Ah woful Ere,
Which tells me, Youth's no longer here!
O Youth! for years so many and sweet,
'Tis known that Thou and I were one,
I'll think it but a fond conceit—
It cannot be that Thou art gone!
Thy vesper-bell hath not yet toll'd
And thou wert aye a masker bold!
What strange disguise hast now put on,
To *make believe* that thou art gone?
I see these locks in silvery slips,
This drooping gait, this altered size;

But Spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes!
Life is but thought: so think I will
That Youth and I are housemates still.

Dew-drops are the gems of morning,
But the tears of mournful eve!
Where no hope is life's a warning
That only serves to make us grieve,
When we are old:
That only serves to make us grieve
With oft and tedious taking leave,
Like some poor nigh-related guest,
That may not rudely be dismist;
Yet hath outstayed his welcome while,
And tells the jest without the smile.

In these strangely pathetic lines, as in all Coleridge's most characteristic poems, may be noted the play of a fancy Shakespearean in its quality. What he lacked, for the purposes of the highest art, was the grandeur and strength of sane common sense, by which Shakespeare always remained in touch with the demands of his audience. "Of imagination all compact," Coleridge, quivering with sensibility, was for ever seeking to realise his dreams in the world, and as often found his hopes destroyed by physical pain, estrangement from friends, domestic uncongeniality, and his own indolence and irresolution; under stress of which his creative faculty gradually withered, after the manner described by himself in the interesting lines appended to the dialogue called *The Improvisatore*:

Yes, yes! that boon, life's richest treat,
He had, or fancied that he had;
Say, 'twas but in his own conceit—
The fancy made him glad!
Crown of his cup and garnish of his dish!
The boon prefigured in his earliest wish,
The fair fulfilment of his poesy,
When his young heart first yearned for sympathy!

But e'en the meteor offspring of his brain
Unnourished wane;
Faith asks her daily bread
And Fancy must be fed!

Now so it chanced—from wet or dry,
It boots not how—I know not why—
She missed her wonted food; and quickly
Poor Fancy staggered and grew sickly.
Then came a restless state, 'twixt yea and nay,
His faith was fixed, his heart all ebb and flow;
Or like a bark in some half-sheltered bay,
Above its anchor driving to and fro.

That boon, which but to have possess'd
In a *belief* gave life a zest—
Uncertain both what it *had been*,
And if by error lost or luck;
And what it *was*;—an evergreen
Which some insidious blight had struck,
Or annual flower, which, past its blow,
No vernal spell shall e'er revive;
Uncertain, and afraid to know,
Doubts tossed him to and fro:
Hope keeping Love, Love Hope alive,
Like babes bewildered in a snow,
That cling and huddle from the cold
In hollow tree or ruined fold.

When an imagination so little qualified to master impulses from without addressed itself to the work of the regular drama, it was almost inevitable that it should fail in the severe purpose required of sustained poetic creation. Coleridge's drama *Osorio* is genuinely dramatic in its main conception, and its temporary success, when acted as *Remorse* on the stage of Drury Lane, shows that, with the aid of scenery and good acting, it possessed qualities capable of pleasing spectators in a theatre. It is indeed full of eloquent and striking passages, which must have been heard with admiration; and it is only in examining the structure of the play that we discern the essentially fragmentary action of the dramatic invention. The idea of a tragedy arising out of the relation between two brothers, one of whom has deprived the other by fraud both of his inheritance and his wife, is capable of being presented in an ideal series of connected incidents. But in Coleridge's treatment of the subject the probabilities of action count for little: the whole strength of his imagination is thrown into a psychological rendering of

the states of mind produced by remorse in the fraudulent brother and his chief accomplice: the machinery of the plot is of a kind which would hardly have satisfied the slender requirements of a second-rate Elizabethan melodrama.

Southey, as a poet, had some of the characteristics both of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Like the former he was an omnivorous reader. Possessed, like Wordsworth, with an intense desire to mark his originality as a poet, he drew for his materials on books with as much persistency as the other had recourse to impressions made by Nature on his own mind. His intellectual curiosity was immense, and he roved through literature with all the industry of a bee collecting honey. But he lacked equally the lyrical faculty aroused in Wordsworth by the intensity of his emotions, and the creative fancy by which Coleridge, in flashes of inspiration, reveals glimpses of a supernatural world. Southey's was a scientific rather than a poetical imagination. As he says of himself:

> Sometimes I soar, where Fancy guides the rein,
> Beyond this visible diurnal sphere:
> But most, with long and self-approving pain,
> Patient pursue the historian's task severe.[1]

The result is, that, in the long quasi-epics which he so industriously composed, the poem always seems to resemble a portico or ante-chapel to the explanatory Notes.

*Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama*, for example, evidently owe their being to the interest in Oriental life and literature excited by the writings of Sir William Jones and French travellers. *Madoc* and *Roderick* are the fruits of early travels in Spain, and of a wide, if superficial, acquaintance with Spanish and Portuguese literature—a literary harvest ripened by the public attention paid to the affairs of the Peninsula during the wars with Napoleon. In none of these compositions does the subject seem to have taken forcible possession of the poet's imagination: the materials are resolutely

[1] *Lay of the Laureate*, Proem 8.

worked into their context by a conscious effort of scientific analysis, which, being perceived by the reader, destroys faith in the poetical illusion. The author himself is always imposing on the reader his didactic self-consciousness. As with Wordsworth, in the case instanced by Charles Lamb, he stands before his audience, telling them how they ought to be pleased, and that, in reading his epics, they are not to perplex themselves with conventional rules. At the close of his preface to *Madoc* he addresses the reader as follows:

> Come, listen to a tale of times of old!
> Come, for ye know me. I am he who sung
> The Maid of Arc, and I am he who framed
> Of Thalaba the wild and wonderous song.
> Come listen to my lay, and ye shall hear
> How Madoc from the shores of Britain spread
> The adventurous sail, explored the ocean paths,
> And quelled barbarian power, and overthrew
> The bloody altars of idolatry,
> And planted in its fanes triumphantly
> The cross of Christ. Come listen to my lay!

The conscious self-importance of the poet and his confidence in his power to create the belief that a Welsh prince, never before heard of by the reader, had twice crossed the Atlantic, without any one venturing to follow in his track until Columbus discovered America and Cortes conquered Mexico, are not less remarkable than his contempt for the advice of Horace:

> difficile est proprie communia dicere; tuque
> rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
> quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.

As *Madoc* is framed on the same principles as D'Avenant's *Gondibert*,[1] its coldness may be similarly accounted for. *Joan of Arc* is not open to the same objection; but the preface to the poem—which, in its censure of all previous epics, resembles the arrogant preface to *Gondibert*—shows a curious failure to understand the expectations of an audience in narrative poetry:

It is the common fault of Epic Poems, that we feel little

[1] See vol. iii. pp. 302-3.

interest for the heroes they celebrate. The national vanity of a Greek or a Roman might have been gratified by the renown of Achilles or Æneas; but to engage the unprejudiced, there must be more of human feelings than is generally to be found in the character of a warrior. From this objection the *Odyssey* alone may be excepted. Ulysses appears as the father and the husband, and the affections are enlisted on his side. The judgment must applaud the well-digested plan and splendid execution of the *Iliad*, but the heart always bears testimony to the merit of the *Odyssey*: it is the poem of nature, and its personages inspire love rather than command admiration. The good herdsman Eumæus is worth a thousand heroes!

At first sight this might be supposed to be the presumption of a youthful critic disputing the maxim of Aristotle that in epic, as in dramatic, poetry the conduct of action is of even more importance than the representation of character.[1] But in truth the keynote to the criticism is found in the sentence about "the good herdsman Eumæus." Far from being intended to engage the interest of "the unprejudiced," *Joan of Arc* is steeped in party spirit. It was written, like *Wat Tyler*, in the days when Southey was a hot advocate of the French Revolution, and a furious opponent of the foreign policy of his native country. The subject is plainly selected with an eye not so much to the invasion of France by Henry V. and his successor, as to the anti-Republican coalition of Monarchs in 1793: no pains are spared in degrading the character of an English monarch whom Shakespeare had made the special national hero; and revolutionary sentiments, quite alien to the historical situation, are put into the mouths of imaginary actors.[2] Nash in the times

[1] See page 434.

[2] Particularly a personage called Conrade, supposed to be a discarded lover of Agnes Sorel, *e.g.*:

> "Perish these mighty ones,"
> Cried Conrade, "these prime ministers of death,
> Who stalk elated o'er their fields of fame,
> And count the thousands they have massacred,
> And with the bodies of the innocent rear
> The pyramid of glory! perish these
> The epitome of all the pestilent plagues
> That Egypt knew! who pour their locust swarms
> O'er ravaged realms, and bid the brooks run blood.

And

of Elizabeth had spoken of the delight with which thousands of spectators in the theatre had witnessed a representation of the great deeds of the English Talbot;[1] but in *Joan of Arc* Talbot plays but a poor part compared with the ideal French hero, Conrade. In a poem composed in such a deliberately anti-national spirit the poet and the audience do not start on equal terms.

Nor does the poet himself quite justify the claims that he makes to sovereignty over the imagination of his readers. Not only is he seen constantly at work in his analytical laboratory, but he does not fully succeed in recombining his imaginative materials. In his poems the real is not essentially fused with the romantic. As to the romance the situations, remote (as in *Madoc*), or abstract (as in *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama*), leave the imagination cold; while sympathy is scarcely conciliated on behalf of ideal personages with such uncouth names as Tezogogo, Tlalala, and Ocellopan. The strength of Southey's narratives lies in the descriptive passages, which are full of curious and accurate learning: only, however, by constant reference to the Notes does the reader discover how much credit is due to the ingenuity of the poet, in utilising details which would otherwise be lost sight of in the colossal size of the whole composition.

The style of Southey, in these long poems, reflects his method of conception. They show the same determination to be original, the same contempt of the author for the requirements—or, as he called them, the prejudices—of his audience. In the preface to *Joan of Arc* he takes credit to himself for rising superior to the faults of his epic predecessors:

> And be they curst! O groves and woodland shades,
> How blest indeed were you, if the iron rod
> Should one day from Oppression's hand be wrenched
> By everlasting Justice! Come that hour
> When in the Sun the Angel of the Lord
> Shall stand and cry to all the fowls of heaven,
> 'Gather ye to the supper of your God,
> That ye may eat the flesh of mighty men,
> Of captains and of kings.'"

[1] Vol. iv. p. 62.

I have avoided what seems useless and wearying in other poems, and my readers will find no description of armour, no muster-rolls, no geographical catalogues, lion, tiger, bull, bear, and boar similes, Phœbuses or Auroras. And where in battle I have particularised the death of an individual, it is, I hope, like the common list of killed and wounded.

Yet, when he is describing a battle, he copies with care the minuteness of Homer in describing wounds, and the ingenuity of Lucan in inventing them, to an extent which most modern readers will consider unnecessary and grotesque: *e.g.*

> The bow-string twanged, on its swift way the dart
> Whizzed fierce, and struck there where the helmet-clasps
> Defend the neck; a weak protection now,
> For through the tube which draws the breath of life
> Pierced the keen shaft; blood down the unwonted way
> Gushed to the lungs.[1]

In the following passage he has added to these descriptive details a Miltonic mannerism, with a view to producing epic elevation:

> But Conrade, rolling round his angry eyes,
> Beheld the English chieftain as he aimed
> Again the bow: with rapid step he strode;
> Nor did not Glacidas the Frank perceive;[2]
> At him he drew the string: the powerless dart
> Fell blunted from his buckler. Fierce he came
> And lifting high his ponderous battle-axe,
> Full on his shoulder drove the furious stroke,
> Deep buried in his bosom: prone he fell,
> The cold air rushed upon his heaving heart.

In *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama* he quits these classic imitations, and adopts a new mode of narrative versification.

"I felt," he says, "that while it gave the poet a wider range of expression, it satisfied the ear of the reader. It were easy to make a parade of learning, by enumerating the various feet which it admits; it is only needful to observe that no two lines are employed in sequence which can be read into one. . . .

[1] Southey's *Poetical Works* (1829), "Joan of Arc," Book viii.

[2] Nor did they not perceive the evil plight
In which they were, or the fierce pains not feel.
*Paradise Lost*, Book i. 335-6.

One advantage the metre assuredly possesses—the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord : he may read it prosaically, but its flow and fall will be still perceptible. Verse is not enough favoured by the English reader : perhaps this is owing to the obtrusiveness, the regular Jews-harp *twing-twang* of what has been foolishly called heroic measure. I do not wish the improvisatore tune; but something that denotes the sense of harmony, something like the accent of feeling, like the tone which every Poet necessarily gives to Poetry."[1]

After all, this comes to no more than that, having selected a subject in which the imagination of the reader has no share, the poet wishes to create an effect of mystery and strangeness, by emancipating himself from the fetters of an established metre. Metre is the law to which the language, common to both the reader and the poet, has been made to conform by the practice of many generations; and in English the varieties of rhythmical movement have been definitely limited, either within stanzas of various kinds, the heroic couplet, or the modulated periods of blank verse. The metre of *Thalaba* shows no creative effort : it is merely the decomposition of iambic blank verse, with the occasional introduction of anapæstic or dactylic rhythms. Four or five lines of heroic blank verse contain the usual five accents, which may be followed, as the poet chooses, either by one or more octosyllabic lines of four accents, or by lines of six syllables and three accents. Then, by a sudden change, a period will follow in which dactylic and iambic rhythms are arbitrarily mixed : *e.g.*

What | woman is | she
So | wrinkled and | old
That | goes to the | wood ?
She | leans on her | staff
With a | tottering | step.
She tells | her bead-|string slow, |
Through fin|gers dull | by age. |
The wan|ton boys | bemock | her ;
The babe | in arms, | that meets | her,
Turns round | with quick | affright,
And clings | to his nurs|e's neck.[2]

[1] Preface to *Thalaba*.

[2] *Thalaba*, Book ix. 16.

When Southey says that "it were easy to make a parade of learning by enumerating the various feet which it [the metre] admits," he cannot mean that these "feet" are naturally anticipated in the metre by the ear of the reader. He must mean, what is undoubtedly true, that the iambic, dactylic, and anapaestic rhythms are all to be found in the language at large, and may be combined at will in "the *tone* which every Poet necessarily gives to Poetry."

Each reader can judge as to the poetical result of the unbounded license of expression which Southey claims for himself. Probably it will be very generally felt that, in a long narrative poem, the jerking and spasmodic movements of the rhymeless metre put an intolerable strain upon the ear. But in brief descriptive passages beautiful effects may undoubtedly be produced, as in the abrupt opening stanza of *Thalaba*:

> How beautiful is night!
> A dewy freshness fills the silent air,
> No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
> Breaks the serene of heaven:
> In full-orbed glory yonder Moon divine
> Rolls through the dark blue depths.
> Beneath her steady ray
> The desert-circle spreads,
> Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.
> How beautiful is night!

In *The Curse of Kehama* Southey limits his freedom by rhyme; and though the reader is not allowed to expect the recurrence of the rhymes at regular intervals, the poet shows such an easy and masterly command over the movement of the metre that the ear is satisfied and left with a sense of repose. The metrical periods indeed are not of themselves adapted to carry the imagination through a narrative poem of great length, in which all the situations are inhuman; but they give a setting of much splendour to the descriptive imagery, as in the following lines, where Southey seems to be inspired by recollections of *Kubla Khan*, which Coleridge had doubtless recited to him:

Then to a garden of the Deity
Ereenia led the Maid.
In the mid-garden towered a giant tree;
Rock-rooted on a mountain-top it grew,
Reared its unrivalled head on high,
And stretched a thousand branches o'er the sky,
Drinking with all its leaves celestial dew.
Lo! where from thence, as from a living well,
A thousand torrents flow!
For still in one perpetual shower,
Like diamond drops, ethereal waters fell
From every leaf of all its ample bower.
Rolling adown the steep
From that aerial height,
Through the deep shade of aromatic trees,
Half-seen, the cataracts shoot their gleams of light,
And pour upon the breeze
Their thousand voices; far away the roar
In modulations of delightful sound,
Half-heard, and ever varying, floats around.
Below an ample lake expanded lies,
Blue as the over-arching skies;
Forth issuing from that lovely Lake,
A thousand rivers water Paradise.
Full to the brink, yet never overflowing,
They cool the amorous gales, which, ever blowing,
O'er their melodious surface love to stray;
Then winding back their way,
Their vapours to the parent tree repay;
And ending thus where they began,
And feeding thus the source from whence they came,
The eternal rivers of the Swerga ran,
For ever renovate, yet still the same.
On that ethereal lake, whose waters lie
Blue and transpicuous, like another sky,
The Elements had reared their King's abode.
A strong controlling power their strife suspended,
And there their hostile essences they blended,
To form a palace worthy of the God.
Built on the Lake the waters were its floor;
And here its walls were water arched with fire,
And here were fire with water vaulted o'er;
And spires and pinnacles of fire
Round watery cupolas aspire,
And domes of rainbow rest on fiery towers,
And roofs of flame are turreted around
With cloud, and shafts of cloud with flame are bound.
Here too the elements for ever veer,

Ranging around with endless interchanging;
Pursued in love, and so in love pursuing,
In endless revolutions here they roll;
For ever their mysterious work renewing
The parts all shifting, still unchanged the whole.[1]

As Southey's youthful ambition was to enlarge the bounds of the traditional forms of poetry, rather than to discover new worlds for the imagination to conquer, he made no attempt, like Wordsworth, to revolutionise the principles of poetical diction. His style is free from a straining after conscious simplicity. His copious vocabulary and manly feeling succeed in avoiding every kind of affectation, and his blank verse is nervous, lucid, and dignified. Its only defect is, that the obviously ambitious nature of the poet's aim is not sufficiently justified by that unmistakable individuality of expression which, springing directly out of poetic inspiration, spontaneously lifts style out of the domain of prose. When the illusions of youth vanished, in Southey's later compositions, to which I shall have occasion to refer hereafter, the prosaic atmosphere of officialism pressed heavily on an imagination which, in the days of early partisanship, was always fresh and eager.

To sum up the poetical achievements of the Lake School: their work was one of renovation which contained in itself a certain element of destruction. They conferred a boon of inestimable value on English taste by giving a salutary shock to the national imagination when it had become effete and exhausted. Full of corruption as it was, English society was far from being radically diseased. The old feudal ideals of loyalty, honour, and chivalry, illustrated in the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, though overlaid by Walpole's materialising policy, were still widely reverenced among the country gentlemen. Many of the spiritual tendencies of the ecclesiastical ages preserved an under-current of religious life amid the semi-Erastianism of the Anglican Establishment. Among the aristocracy deeply-rooted feudal

[1] *Curse of Kehama*, viii. 9.

institutions kept alive a love of the country with its customs and sports, in striking contrast, as M. Taine observes, with the habits of the French nobility, who, under the *ancien régime*, were never happy away from Versailles.[1] Wordsworth's poetry tended to give new vitality to these suppressed elements in the English imagination. It appealed to primitive instincts and simple affections, and by awakening interest in the secret life of external nature, helped to enlarge the perceptions of a society long morbidly absorbed in the observation of artificial manners. Men began to feel a grandeur in sights and objects which they had been accustomed to view with indifference or aversion :

> The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
> And in the narrow rent, at every turn,
> Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spoke by the wayside
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.[2]

Wordsworth could not justly claim (though he did claim) to have *created* this feeling for Nature : had he merely done this his poetry might have perished with the mood to which he had given birth. Before him Cowper, speaking the feelings of many Englishmen, had said, 'God made the country and man made the town"[3]; while Thomson, describing the spread of light in the early morning, had reproduced in verse effects which the eye

[1] See vol. v. p. 460. [2] *The Simplon Pass.*
[3] *The Task*, Book i.

had been long trained to observe by the art of the landscape painter.[1]

Wordsworth's real praise is to have done for the poetry of Nature what Pope did for the poetry of manners: to have found the highest form of utterance for a widely diffused feeling; "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." Neither the semi-deistic philosophy of Thomson, nor the Calvinistic quietism of Cowper, had such power to awake emotion in the imagination as the passionate enthusiasm thrown by Wordsworth into his lines on Tintern Abbey. And so too, though a path had been prepared for him to appeal to the simpler affections of his readers by the revival of the Ballad form which had been in progress for some time before he began to write, no previous poet had used the form for modern sentiment with such power and pathos as he shows in the ballad of *Lucy Gray*.

Coleridge's reform in English poetry was exerted in a different direction, and was mainly concerned with the technical side of the art. Before his time the rhythms employed by English poets had been almost exclusively iambic or trochaic, and the traditional tendency was to confine them more and more within the heroic couplet, which, from its narrow limits gave little scope for liberty or variety of movement, and, however effective for the purposes of epigram, was an inadequate vehicle for the expression of powerful emotions. Coleridge, advancing along the line of invention opened by Chatterton, converted the ancient rhythms and metres of the language into vehicles for his own imaginative thought. His ear was haunted by the possibilities of metrical tunes suggested to him by his study of ballad poetry; and he associated these with the strange, and—as it seemed to him—supernatural experiences of his own imagination, with genius akin to that of a musician. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* he showed that it was possible, through the Ballad form, to give expression to a marvellous series of supernatural incidents; *Christabel* was an

[1] *The Seasons*, "Summer," 43-94.

illustration of the beautiful and picturesque effects that might be created in the fancy by the combination of dactylic with iambic and trochaic rhythms in the line of four accents.

Southey marched in his poetry along both the tracks explored by the other two members of the Lake School. He was at one with Wordsworth in his admiration for Nature, and in his desire to arouse simple and manly emotions: he followed, or even occasionally preceded, Coleridge in the novelty of his metrical experiments. But as he was much inferior in genius to his friends, he has left behind him no poetry which is, like theirs, of a monumental character.

While the work of the Lake Poets is always full of life, freshness, and individuality, they introduced into the art a certain destructive tendency by their neglect of tradition. Hitherto the course of English poetry had resembled the growth of the English Constitution in the continuity of its development. One poet had worked upon and enlarged the lines of his predecessors. In the words of Dryden:

> Milton was the poetical son of Spenser, and Mr. Waller of Fairfax, for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuated that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body, and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original, and many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own that he derived the harmony of his numbers from the *Godfrey of Bulloigne*, which was turned into English by Mr. Fairfax.[1]

This process of gradual evolution now ceased. Brought up in an atmosphere of revolution the Lake School, in their insurrection against the fashionable taste of the age, were determined to strike out for themselves in poetry a completely original path; and in their theory, as well as in much of their work, Wordsworth and Coleridge departed altogether from traditional practice. They placed the source of poetical inspiration exclusively in the mind of the individual poet, without reference to those active

[1] Preface to *Fables*.

fountains of social feeling, thought, and language, from which the reader as well as the poet had been accustomed to derive his imaginative ideas.

Individualism so deliberate often drew their imagination out of the deep stream of national poetry, and stranded them on rocks or in shallows. It led Wordsworth to his perverted conclusion that there was no essential difference between the language of poetry and prose, and that the true models of poetical diction were to be looked for in the language of the peasantry. Contempt for conventional literary forms, joined to a fanatical confidence in the soundness of his own philosophy, produced in his style that frequent prosiness which so often mars in his poetry the effect of a sublime context, and which is subtly characterised by Coleridge himself in one of his letters to Thomas Allsop:

> Poets (especially if philosophers too) are apt to represent the effect made upon themselves as general; the geese of Phœbus are all swans; and Wordsworth's shepherds and estates men are Wordsworths, even (as in old Michael) in the unpoetic traits of character.[1]

In the work of Coleridge intense individuality produced a different effect. Prosiness can never be imputed to his style. His poetry reflects rather the dreaminess, the irresolution, the fragmentary character of his thought. In his case and in that of Wordsworth it may well be that the defects of their qualities were inevitable; that the genius which inspired *The Highland Reaper* necessarily strayed into the long barren wastes of prose in *The Excursion*; that the inconclusiveness of *Christabel* is inseparably connected with the beauty of its imagery and its music; and that, without faults like these, English taste could never have been extricated from the morass of conventionalism into which it had sunk. Admitting this possibility, History is still bound to point out the dangers to which the art has been exposed by the disregard of tradition and experience.

[1] *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge* (1835), vol. i. p. 105.

# CHAPTER VIII

## ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

### The Poetry of Romantic Self-Representation: George Noel, Lord Byron

THOUGH Wordsworth and Coleridge both ended their career by becoming champions of the social system which they began with attacking, the poetical principles they had started took root in their own age and bore fruit in the next. The doctrine of the liberty and supremacy of the individual imagination was congenial to many spirits which had long been prepared for a revolt against the conventions of classical rule; and the Nature-worship inaugurated in the poetry of Wordsworth was soon translated into many forms of artistic self-expression, all tending to collide with ethical or aesthetic conclusions established in the national conscience by long and unbroken tradition. Most powerful of all these revolutionary forces was the poetry of Byron.

George Noel Byron was born in Holles Street, London, on the 22nd January 1788. In his character, as finally developed, were concentrated many of the historic qualities of an ancient family. The first Lord Byron, in the age of the Civil War was an ardent Cavalier, whose headlong bravery was the cause of some of the victories and more of the defeats of the Royalist army. The fifth, known as the "wicked" Lord, killed his neighbour and kinsman, Mr. Chaworth in a duel, and was tried before the House of Lords on a charge of murder. After his acquittal he retired to Newstead Abbey, the family seat, where he

lived in wasteful solitude, cutting down the timber and allowing the house to fall into ruinous decay. As he died without descendants the succession passed into a collateral line. The poet's grandfather, Admiral John Byron, was a bold naval explorer, whose hardships at sea obtained for him the name of "Foul-weather Jack," and some of whose experiences are utilised for the description of the shipwreck in *Don Juan*. His eldest son, John, a man of handsome person and licentious habits, eloped with and, after her divorce from her husband, married, the Marchioness of Carmarthen, having by her a daughter Augusta, married in 1807 to Colonel Leigh. In 1787, his first wife having died, Captain Byron married Catherine Gordon, heiress of Gight, in Aberdeenshire, with a fortune of about £23,000, who became by him the mother of the poet. John Byron soon wasted his wife's money, and was obliged to take up his abode in France, whence Mrs. Byron, being deserted by her husband, returned to London just before her son's birth, after which she lived on the remnant of her fortune in Aberdeen. She was a woman not without understanding, but of an unrestrained temper, who treated her child with an alternation of fondness and violence, thus early implanting in him tendencies which grew into the lawless habits of his later years. He was sent to the Grammar School at Aberdeen, but seems to have learned little during his childhood except from his nurse, Mary Gray, from whom he gained a considerable knowledge of the Bible. In 1798, on the death of his grand-uncle, the fifth lord, he succeeded to the title and the family estates, and in 1799 was placed at the school of a Dr. Glennie at Dulwich, where the slight lameness with which he was born was increased by unskilful medical treatment.

From this school he was sent to Harrow in 1801. At first he was not happy there, but he endured the bullying, fought his way up the school, and during the last year and a half before going to Cambridge became devotedly attached to it. The atmosphere of the place did much to develop two of the most

prominent features in his character, his stubborn rebelliousness and his romantic affections. Harrow was essentially a Whig school, mainly filled with the sons of that section of the English aristocracy who brought from their homes an hereditary attachment to the historic tradition of liberty, and with youthful spirit readily developed this into lawlessness. The boys were accustomed to take their own share in the appointment of a Head-master, and in 1771 the choice by the Governors of Dr. Heath, as successor to Sumner, had led to a rebellion which ended in the secession of a considerable part of the school to Stanmore under Samuel Parr, for whom the appointment had been desired. In 1805 another rebellion of the same kind occurred owing to the unpopular appointment of Dr. George Butler instead of Mark Drury in the place of Dr. Joseph Drury. This may have been the occasion on which Byron, who was one of the ring-leaders, declares that he prevented the boys from burning down the Fourth-form Room in the old school, by pointing out to them the names of their ancestors carved on the walls. It was at any rate then that he wrote his satire "Pomposus" of which he afterwards repented.

At Harrow he formed many of those enthusiastic friendships which he records in *Hours of Idleness*, and to some of which he alludes in *Childe Harold*. External evidence that cannot be questioned points to the extraordinary precocity of his passions. His emotions were as transitory as they were powerful, but so long as they lasted they seemed to absorb his whole being. He records in his Journal for 26th November 1813 his love for his cousin Mary Duff, and marvels at the hold it obtained over him at so early an age as eight years. In September 1803 he was seized with a passion for his neighbour Miss Chaworth, so vehement that he refused to return to Harrow after the summer holidays. His mother writing to her solicitor says:

> He has no indisposition that I know of but love, desperate love, the worst of all maladies in my opinion. In short the boy

is distractedly in love with Miss Chaworth, and he has not been with me three weeks all the time he has been in this county, but spent all his time at Annesley.[1]

He did not go back to school till after the Christmas holidays.

Powerful as appears to have been this boyish passion, even the remembrance of it was for the moment obliterated by the romance of his school friendships. In "Childish Recollections," a poem published in *Hours of Idleness*, he speaks (at the age of nineteen) of

> Hours of my youth! when nurtured in my breast,
> To Love a stranger, Friendship made me blest;

and in another contemporary poem, entitled *L'Amitié est l'Amour sans Ailes* (a proverb which seems at this time to have fastened on his fancy), he addresses Harrow in a stanza that at once appeals to the heart of every Harrovian:

> Seat of my youth! thy distant spire
> Recalls each scene of joy;
> My bosom glows with former fire,
> In mind again a boy.
> Thy grove of elms, thy verdant hill,
> Thy every path delights me still,
> Each flower a double fragrance flings;
> Again, as once, in converse gay,
> Each dear associate seems to say
> "Friendship is love without his wings."

His special friends at Harrow, celebrated under the names of Alonzo, Davus, Lycus, Euryalus, and Cleon, were the Hon. John Wingfield, John Tattersall, Lord Clare, Lord Delawarr, and Edward Long; and one poem in the Collection is addressed to the Duke of Dorset who was apparently his "fag."

Joseph Drury, the Head-master, succeeded entirely in gaining his affection and respect, and was able to exercise over him a gentle control. But at home, in the holidays, the injudicious conduct of his mother alienated all feelings of love. Writing to his half-sister, Augusta, on 11th November 1804, he says:

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray, 1898), *Letters and Journals*, vol. i. p. 16.

I am in great hopes that at Christmas I shall be with Hanson during the vacation. I shall do all I can to avoid a visit to my mother wherever she is. It is the first duty of a parent to impress precepts of obedience on their children, but her method is so violent, so capricious, that the patience of Job, the versatility of a member of the House of Commons could not support it. I revere Dr. Drury much more than I do her, yet he is never violent, never outrageous: I dread offending him, but the respect I bear him makes me unhappy when I am under his displeasure. My mother's precepts never convey instruction, never fix upon my mind; to be sure they are calculated to inculcate obedience, so are chains and tortures, but though they may restrain for a time, the mind revolts from such treatment.[1]

In society, as was natural for a boy conscious of great powers, checked by want of sympathy in those nearest to him, he was shy and awkward, but readily responsive to any one who showed an understanding of his feelings, a characteristic which may be noted in all his correspondence with the Pigots, neighbours of his mother while she was living at Burgage Manor, Southwell. Having matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, on 1st July 1805, he went up in the following October, and seems to have been pleased with the freedom of college life as compared with the restraint he endured at home from his "domestic tyrant, Mrs. Byron."[2] Without giving any heed to its studies, he joined eagerly in all the amusements afforded by the life of an English University; but (though Newstead was now a source of revenue to his guardians) he was much hampered by money difficulties, which made him desirous of leaving Cambridge at the end of his second year. Eventually he resolved to remain another year for the purpose of taking his degree, but the fruits of his last period of residence were a great accumulation of debt.

He took his M.A. degree on the 4th July 1808, before which date he had made his first public appearance as an author. In November 1806 he published, through S. and J. Ridge of Newark, a collection of poems entitled

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray), *Letters*, vol. i. pp 47-8.
[2] *Ibid. Letters*, vol. i p. 81.

*Fugitive Pieces.* This volume he suppressed on the advice of his friend Mr. Becher, a clergyman, but reprinted it with one or two omissions and several additions in January 1807, calling the new series *Poems on Various Occasions.* In the summer of the same year the collection was increased by the addition of twelve new poems, making in all thirty-nine, and was published with the title *Hours of Idleness; a series of Poems Original and Translated. By George Gordon, Lord Byron, a Minor.* The poems were favourably reviewed in many quarters, and Byron was gratified, not only by the flattery which his work procured for him from persons in fashionable society, but by the letters of congratulation he received from men of mark in literature. In January 1808, however, *Hours of Idleness* was criticised by *The Edinburgh Review* in the tone of contemptuous depreciation which had now become characteristic of that periodical. If Byron had not been previously encouraged by the unsolicited praise which he had received from those whom he had every right to consider as good and impartial judges, possibly disgust and irritation might have confirmed him in his proclaimed resolution to write no more poetry. As it was, the shock having been lessened by a warning he had received with regard to the nature of the forthcoming article, his mind was prepared for retaliation, and his weapons were ready to his hand. He had already written 380 lines of a satire on the poetry of the period under the title *British Bards*: it was a simple matter for him to supplement this with an attack on the critics of *The Edinburgh Review*, and to publish (March 1809) the enlarged composition in its famous form of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.* The satire was at once successful. Though it was published anonymously, Byron made no attempt to conceal the authorship, and, read in connection with the romantic *Hours of Idleness*, the versatility displayed in the composition assured the public of the arrival of a new poet of genius. A second edition was called for in the following October, and two more editions during Byron's absence from England. These lasted for two

years. After his return from his travels he was preparing a fifth edition, when he changed his mind, resolved to suppress the satire, and in 1812 gave instructions to the publisher Cawthorn to burn the whole of the new impression.

Meantime he had put into the hands of Dallas, a literary acquaintance who had shown particular sympathy with his previous productions, two cantos of a poem, written abroad, of which he entertained but a poor opinion. Dallas, after negotiations with several publishers, showed them to John Murray, who readily undertook to publish them. They appeared in March 1812, with the title of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and produced an electrical effect. "I awoke in the morning," says Byron, "to find myself famous." Could any critic have taken a bird's-eye view of the state of contemporary imagination, the success of the poem might have been confidently anticipated. The Della Cruscan craze itself was merely an absurd symptom of the extent to which fashionable society had been penetrated by the spirit of ennui and romantic sensibility. *Hours of Idleness* was a product of the same disease, exhibited in a more genuinely poetical form; and when *Childe Harold* made its appearance, gratifying at once the craving of the mind for a larger liberty, and the desire to see its own weariness and suppressed energy embodied in an imaginative shape, the enthusiasm of the polite world knew no bounds. Byron became the idol of the ruling aristocracy, and for four years the leaders of fashion, male and female, echoed with servility the note of romanticism which he had sounded in his poetry. He himself surveyed the crowd of his worshippers with his usual clear-sighted cynicism. At first he was satisfied with the incense offered to him, and talked, with an author's affectation, of writing no more. He made the most of the favours which were lavished on him by the most beautiful women of the time, lent his assistance languidly to the promotion of the Whig political interest, or indulged his humour by keeping company with prize-fighters and tavern-haunters.

Presently the ambition for poetical fame began again to work, and in June 1813 bore fruit in *The Giaour*, which was followed in November of the same year by *The Bride of Abydos*. Both poems created as much enthusiasm as *Childe Harold*. Scarcely had the latter of them been published, when the poet set to work again and—an astonishing feat—wrote in a fortnight (December 18-31) *The Corsair*, which in popularity eclipsed both of its immediate predecessors. "I sold," says Murray, "on the day of publication—a thing perfectly unprecedented —10,000 copies."[1] *The Corsair* was succeeded by *Lara* published together with Rogers's *Jacqueline*, in August 1814. This too produced a profound sensation. John Murray writes to his wife on 29th August 1814 that he has sold the whole 6000 of the first edition, and hopes to sell 10,000 more. It is a proof of the extraordinary capriciousness of Byron's temper that, in spite of his successes, some unfavourable criticism of his *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, published anonymously, in April 1814, so disgusted him that he wrote to Murray, enclosing a draft for the copyright of all his works, which he had determined to suppress, and only consented to revoke his determination at Murray's earnest request, and on the plea that such a proceeding "would be inconvenient to him."[2]

The tide of his popularity was now on the turn. He was bitterly attacked in *The Courier* and other Tory papers after the publication of *The Corsair* for appending to that poem *Stanzas on a Lady Weeping*, which had originally appeared anonymously in *The Morning Chronicle*, after the Prince Regent had refused to displace the Ministry in favour of his former Whig friends. *The Courier* also indulged in sarcastic remarks on the large sums of money he was supposed to have received from Murray, and on the inconsistency of the flattering terms in which he now publicly addressed many of those whom he had so unscrupulously reviled in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. He was overwhelmed with debts, to extricate himself from which the most obvious resource

[1] Smiles, *Memoir of John Murray*, i. 223. [2] *Ibid.* i. 229.

seemed to be to sell Newstead. Negotiations for this purpose were far advanced in 1812, when a Mr. Claughton offered himself as a purchaser for £140,000, but, as the latter was unable to complete the purchase, he was allowed to withdraw with a forfeit of £25,000, and the poet still remained involved in financial difficulty. The property was eventually sold to Byron's old school-fellow, Colonel Wildman, for £94,500 after he himself had finally left England.

Another way of relief from his embarrassments was a marriage suitable in respect of fortune. To this he had for some time been advised by others, and was himself inclined. The lady on whom his thoughts fixed themselves was Anna Isabella Milbanke, prospective heiress of her father, Sir Ralph Milbanke, and, on her mother's side, of the second Lord Wentworth. Byron made her acquaintance in 1812, and was attracted by the simplicity and sincerity of her manners, contrasting favourably, as they did, with those of the fashionable society by which he was at once flattered and bored. In the autumn of that year he proposed to her, but was rejected. Miss Milbanke, however, must have repented of her first resolution. She resumed a correspondence with him in the following year, and though her letters to him have not been published, his to her are of the greatest interest, as suggesting an incompatibility of temperament which made inevitable the subsequent separation. Byron evidently admired his correspondent's intellect. In writing to her he lays aside completely the tone of reckless cynicism which he persistently maintains with men—even those so intimate with him as Moore—and addresses her in language at once serious and respectful. He admits unreservedly his own moral defects: at the same time he holds out no hope "that these are ever likely to be cured by a growing sense of religion." On the other hand, as far as can be gathered from Byron's letters, Miss Milbanke, an exalted idealist, of the strictest moral and religious principles, flattered by the deference paid to her opinions by a man of powerful genius, trusted too confidently to the influence

she might exercise over him as a wife. Her interest in him rapidly ripened into attachment. They were engaged in September 1814, and on the 2nd of January of the following year were married in Seaham House "by special license, with consent of parents."

Marriage speedily brought disillusion. On Byron's side no one can examine the letters which he wrote to Moore between the date of his marriage and the final separation without reading between their lines, when taken in connection with the rest of the evidence, his dissatisfaction with the state of life to which he had voluntarily bound himself. The letters of others speak to the disturbance of his mind within a short period of his marriage.[1] A secret remorse preying upon his conscience, joined to perpetual money difficulties, and a weariness of domestic calm, produced in him a morbid irritability of feeling which may well have found vent in utterances suggestive of madness. From Lady Byron's public statements and private letters on the subject it is clear that, for a long time, she considered her husband insane, and connected his disease with a sentiment of revenge against herself, possibly arising out of his proud resentment at her first rejection of his suit. Writing to Mrs. Leigh on 19th January 1816 she says:

> Such is peculiarly the character of Revenge—a passion you know he is capable of feeling, and which has so long formed the *principle of conduct* towards me, as all my retrospections prove, that a change is impossible unless the whole mind were renovated or restored. And it is unhappy that my presence must, in case of more confirmed disease, tend to awaken the morbid ideas by

[1] Mrs. Leigh writing to her brother's friend Hodgson, on 18th March 1815, says of Lady Byron: "I think I never saw or heard or read of a more perfect being in mortal mould than she appears to be"; and in a subsequent letter to the same correspondent she writes: "I am sorry to say his nerves and spirits are very far from what I wish them, but don't speak of this to him on any account. I think the uncomfortable state of his affairs is the cause; at least I can discern no other. He has every outward blessing this world can bestow. I trust that the Almighty will be graciously pleased to grant him those inward feelings of peace and calm which are now unfortunately wanting."—*Works of Lord Byron* (John Murray), *Journal and Letters*, vol. iii. p. 189.

association. In short there *cannot* be any hope for me. *I* never can do good.

I think he was so much pleased with my 2nd letter from one expression which acknowledged the power he still has over my affections; and the *love of power* is one principal feature of his Disease or Character. My own conviction of the existence of the former, in any greater degree than many years ago, decreases; but I enclose a few lines for his inspection, if you think that conformable with medical directions: it may be of service that he should read anything from me.[1]

Again, writing to Hodgson, after she had resolved on separating from her husband, she says:

I married Lord B. determined to endure everything whilst there was *any* chance of my contributing to his welfare. I remained with him under trials of the severest nature. In leaving him, which, however, I can scarcely call a *voluntary* measure, I probably saved him from the bitterest remorse. I may give you a general idea of what I have experienced, by saying that he married me with the deepest determination of revenge, avowed on the day of my marriage, and executed ever since with systematic and increasing cruelty, which no affection could change. My security depended on the total abandonment of every moral and religious principle against which (though I trust they were never obtruded) his hatred and endeavours were uniformly directed. The circumstances, which are of too convincing a nature, shall not be generally known while Lord B. allows me to spare him. It is not unkindness that can always change affection.[2]

Lady Byron, doubtless, took an exaggerated view of a temper which she was constitutionally unable to understand, and interpreted chance expressions of her husband in a literal and prosaic sense. But the above passages throw light on the steadfastness of her determination to separate from him when she became convinced that those symptoms of his conduct towards her, which she had at

[1] *Works of Lord Byron* (Murray), *Journal and Letters*, vol. iii. p. 297.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 313. It is plain, from the wording of this letter, that Lady Byron is alluding to circumstances of the same kind as those of which she informed her mother after parting from her husband. "A day or two after her arrival at Kirkby her mother, Lady Noel, drew from her many circumstances of her misery, and *Lady Byron's own conviction that her life would be endangered by returning to his roof*" (*Astarte*, p. 136).

first imputed to madness, were really the indications of character. On the 10th December 1815 was born their daughter, Augusta Ada Byron. In January 1816 Lady Byron left London for Kirkby Mallory, the residence of her parents, still entertaining the belief that her husband was suffering from a temporary attack of madness. Soon after her arrival she became convinced from the reports of the doctors that he was not mad, and Sir Ralph Noel (for he had recently taken that name) wrote to Byron at her request proposing an amicable separation, which was finally agreed to on 21st April 1816.

Such is Lady Byron's own statement on the subject, the accuracy of which there is not the slightest reason to doubt. What the exact circumstances were that caused her to form her unalterable resolution she herself never disclosed to the public. But her correspondence with Mrs. Leigh, during the whole of the period while the possibility of Byron's madness was under her consideration, proves, beyond question, that her motive was not that alleged by the late Mrs. Beecher Stowe. Whatever she may have told that lady in later years, after certain communications had passed between herself and her sister-in-law, it is certain that, when the separation was arranged, she had at the most no more than the ground of rumour for a suspicion of the facts that Mrs. Stowe asserts were the cause of her action.[1] All that she herself chose to say upon the subject is contained in her own statement; and that is the sole evidence with which the historian is required to deal.

Byron did not practise the same reserve. He was determined that his intimate friends should not remain under the impression that his wife's reticence was likely to create, and with this object he wrote the verses entitled "Fare thee well" and "A Sketch," showed them to Murray, and directed him to put them into type for private distribution. Though he did not intend them for publication,

1 "The causes of this suspicion did not amount to proof, and Lady Byron did not consider herself justified in acting upon these suspicions by immediately quitting Lord B.'s house" (Statement A. L., dated March 14, 1816).

the poems, as usually happens under such circumstances, found their way to the newspapers, and provided society with a subject for discussion which ought to have been buried in the profoundest privacy. The domestic scandal at once associated itself with party feeling. Byron had given expression to his political sentiments in the lines beginning respectively, "We do not curse thee, Waterloo," inserted in *The Morning Chronicle*, 15th March 1816, and "Star of the brave!" printed in *The Examiner*, 7th April 1816; when therefore the more personal poems appeared in public (14th April) the disgust which they excited gave an opportunity to the editor of *The Champion*, a Tory paper, to point out that want of patriotism was a natural accompaniment of corruption of morals. Similar opinions were expressed in *The Times* and *The Morning Post*; on the other hand, the defence of Byron was undertaken by Opposition journals such as *The Examiner*, *The Independent Whig*, and *The Sunday News*. With the controversy over his private affairs made thus public, while the reasons for the separation remained necessarily mysterious, Byron, alienated from those nearest to him, and overwhelmed by debt, perceived that it was impossible for him to remain in England, and on the 25th April 1816 departed for ever from his native country.

The remaining story of his life may be more briefly told. In May he made the acquaintance of Shelley and his wife at Secheron, a suburb of Geneva, and spent some time with them on the shores of the lake, where (at Ouchy, near Lausanne) he wrote *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and finished the third canto of *Childe Harold*, while at Diodati he wrote *The Dream*. In October he went with his friend Hobhouse into Italy by way of the Simplon, and after a brief stay at Milan and Verona passed on from the latter place to Venice. Here for nearly three years he fixed his headquarters, making excursions from it, as the impulse seized him, to other Italian cities, Ferrara, Florence, and Rome. The lax habits of Venetian society suited the recklessness of his mood since his quarrel with England.

"I was always very partial to Venice," he writes to one correspondent, "and it has not hitherto disappointed me; but I am not sure that the English in general would like it. I am sure that I should *not*, if *they* did; but by the benevolence of God they prefer Florence and Naples, and do not infest us greatly here. In other respects it is very agreeable for Gentlemen of desultory habits—women—wine—and wassail being all extremely fair and reasonable—theatres, etc., good—and Society (after a time) as pleasant as anywhere else (at least to my mind), if you will live with them in their own way—which is different of course from the Ultramontane in some degree. . . . Young and old—pretty and ugly—high and low—are employed in the laudable practice of Love-making—and though most Beauty is found amongst the middling and lower classes—this of course only renders their amatory habits more universally diffused."[1]

These principles he translated into practice by two more or less serious intrigues—one with Marianna Segati, the wife of a draper in the Frezzina, the other with a woman of a still lower position, Margarita Cogni, who could neither read nor write, but who amused him "with her *naïveté* and Pantaloon humour." Shelley, who saw a good deal of him in Venice in the autumn and winter of 1818, comments on his life there in a letter to Peacock:

The fact is that first, the Italian women with whom he associates are perhaps the most contemptible of all who exist under the moon—the most ignorant, the most disgusting, the most bigoted. Well, L. B. is familiar with the lowest of these women, the people his gondolieri pick up in the streets. He associates with wretches who seem almost to have lost the gait and physiognomy of man, and who do not scruple to avow practices, which are not only not named, but I believe even seldom conceived in England. He says he disapproves, but he endures. He is heartily and deeply discontented with himself; and contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts the nature and the habits of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt and despair? But that he is a great poet I think the address to Ocean proves. And he has a certain degree of candour while you talk to him, but unfortunately it does not outlast your departure. No, I do not doubt, and for his own sake I ought to hope, that his present career must end soon in some violent circumstance.[2]

[1] *Byron's Works* (*Letters*), vol. iv. p. 233.
[2] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 235.

Shelley viewed Byron in the light of his own idealism. In spite of a degraded course of life the mind of the latter lost none of its intellectual vigour, as may be seen from his correspondence during his residence at Venice, more particularly his letters to Moore and Murray; and it was at this period that he wrote the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, *Beppo*, and the opening cantos of *Don Juan*. Nor was he diverted from his dissipated habits by any catastrophe, but rather by something like a genuine attachment to Teresa, the young and romantically sentimental wife of Count Guiccioli, whose acquaintance he made in the autumn of 1818. His relations with this lady were for some time carried on in the usual Italian fashion, without any objection on the part of the husband; but after a while the latter, alarmed by Byron's association with the Italian Carbonari, demanded that his wife should give up her lover. When she refused, a separation from the Count was effected by decree of the Pope. The Countess then lived under the protection of Byron, who evidently felt that the circumstances in which he had involved her imposed on him what was practically a permanent obligation. The sense of his responsibility at least lifted him out of the slough into which he had sunk at Venice, and Shelley, writing to his wife, some three years after his first letter about Byron to Peacock, says:

> L. B. is greatly improved in every respect. In genius, in temper, in moral views, in health, in happiness. The connexion with La Guiccioli has been an inestimable benefit to him.[1]

Under this new influence Byron's imagination reverted towards the more abstract and dramatic forms of romance that he had employed at an earlier stage of inspiration for the expression of his personal sentiments. In the spring of 1820 he began his tragedy of *Marino Faliero*, which he completed in July of the same year, and which was published together with *The Prophecy of Dante* in April 1821. Though never intended for the stage, the tragedy was seized upon by Elliston, manager of

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 421.

Drury Lane Theatre, and acted on 25th April 1821—necessarily without success. Byron had done all that was possible to prevent its representation, and was indignant at the disregard of his wishes. The failure of the tragedy on the stage did not prevent him from continuing to write in the dramatic form. *Marino Faliero* was followed by *Sardanapalus*, begun in January 1821, and published together with *The Two Foscari* and *Cain, a Mystery*, in December of the same year. *Werner*, begun in 1815, was completed on the 20th of January 1822, and was published by Murray in the following December. Medwin says that it "was written in twenty-eight days, and one entire act at a sitting. The MS. had scarcely an alteration in it for pages together."[1] The dramatic cycle was concluded with *Heaven and Earth*, a "Mystery" published in *The Liberal* in 1822.

His new mood made no difference in his quarrel with English society, and with many of his most eminent poetical contemporaries. He continued from 1818 to produce canto after canto of *Don Juan*, expressing in them his contempt for established opinion in England, and concentrating his satire more particularly on the person of the Poet Laureate. Byron's attitude towards Southey varied considerably. The latter had been one of the chief victims of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*; but he had met his satirist at Holland House in September 1813 with what he calls "becoming courtesy on both sides," and in 1815 Byron's praise of *Roderick* had come to Southey's ears. In 1818, however, as Mr. Prothero justly says, Byron had come to regard Southey "as the personification of successful cant,"[2] and believed that he had grounds of private resentment against him. "I understand," he then wrote to Murray, "the scoundrel said on his return from Switzerland two years ago that 'Shelley and I were in a league of Incest.'" From this date onward Southey appears in Byron's letters and poems as the representation of all that

[1] Medwin, *Conversations*, p. 412.
[2] *Byron's Letters* (Murray), vol. vi. p. 379.

was most hateful to the writer in English politics and English taste. He addressed to the Laureate a dedication of *Don Juan*, and made a bitter attack on him in a *Reply* to Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* for August 1819, in which *Don Juan* had been severely criticised. Neither the dedication nor the *Reply*, however, was published during Byron's lifetime, and, except for incidental allusions in *Don Juan*, Southey remained unmolested by Byron till he himself attacked the latter, in the preface to his *Vision of Judgment* (published on 11th April 1821), as the leader of the "Satanic school" of poetry.

This assault was delivered professedly on public grounds, both religious and political. Southey traced the system on which he supposed Byron and his allies to write, to the doctrines of the French Revolution. But his theory laid him open to an instant and deadly retort. Whether or no his accusation was well founded—and, in an Appendix to *The Two Foscari*, published on 11th December 1821, Byron denied its justice—it was not one that could consistently be preferred by the author of *Wat Tyler* and the scheme of Pantisocracy. No doubt the latter had repudiated his old opinions; but he was thereby exposed to the always odious charge of being a renegade; at the same time the absurd metrical form in which his new creed was put forward in his *Vision of Judgment* offered a fair mark to a poet of Byron's inventive wit.

The counter-attack on Southey and the governing society of England was published in the first number of *The Liberal*, published 15th October 1822. This was a paper of Revolutionary opinions, printed in London by John Hunt, but furnished mainly with contributions from Pisa by Byron, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt, brother of the publisher and the prime originator of the magazine Byron had, in the first instance, sent his own *Vision of Judgment* to John Murray, but as that publisher hesitated to make himself responsible for it, he gave the copyright to John Hunt, and at the same time broke off all com-

mercial relations with Murray; his latest productions, *The Age of Bronze* and *The Island*, being published by Hunt in 1823. The association of Byron with the Hunts was unfortunate. Both of the latter were pushing adventurers, and though Leigh Hunt was a man of talent, his impecuniosity and conceit, joined to an imperfect sense of obligation to those who assisted him, almost necessarily degraded, in the eyes of the public, any one who seemed to be co-operating with him on terms of equality. *The Liberal* lived through only four numbers. The death of Shelley, and Byron's sense of being in a false position, caused the conduct of the periodical to be left in the hands of Leigh Hunt, who, thrown upon his own resources, was unable to sustain it at the high level required by the extreme principles it sought to propagate. Byron's treatment of the Hunts, whatever the latter alleged against him, was liberal, even generous. He helped Leigh Hunt to settle at Pisa, and during 1822 assisted him with money to the extent of nearly £600. When the latter applied to him on behalf of his brother, he gave John *The Vision of Judgment*, and afterwards allowed him to publish *The Age of Bronze*, together with cantos vi.-xiv. of *Don Juan*, retaining the copyrights, but asking for no share in the profits. He also paid the expenses of John Hunt when prosecuted for the publication of *The Vision of Judgment*.

Byron's critical opinions, which are no less characteristic than his politics, were definitely set forth in his two letters to an unnamed correspondent (John Murray) on Bowles' essay on "Invariable Principles" in poetry (1820); and indeed, in the last four years of his life, his letters breathe an air of resolute conviction which contrasts favourably with the cynical bravado of his sentiments during the earlier part of his residence at Venice. Political ardour at last withdrew him altogether from the field of literature. In May 1823 he was elected a member of the Greek Committee, and entered upon a career of active enterprise in behalf of the independence of Greece. A momentary indecision, caused by his consideration for the

Countess Guiccioli's position, having been overcome, in July 1823 he sailed from Genoa to join the insurgents, and landing in the island of Cephalonia in August, passed thence in December, after a stay of about five months, to Mesolonghi, which was then under blockade by the Turks. His relations with the Greeks are characterised by the clearness of vision and the absence of idealism which show themselves in his letters. He aided them largely with money, and did his best to reconcile their divisions and to organise their untrained forces. This was unfortunately a task beyond his power. The Greeks were split into two factions, one of which was headed by Prince Mavrocordato, the other, smaller but more active, by Koloktronos. As the former was the leader officially recognised by the Greeks, he received Byron's support, but in action he showed only incapacity ; so that Byron's part was necessarily confined to the passive defence of Mesolonghi. He maintained at his own expense 500 Suliotes, who for eight months had received no pay, on condition that the Greek provisional Government should provide for 100 more : the whole force was placed under his command. The Greeks and the Suliotes hated each other, and Byron found the greatest difficulty in getting them to act together. In the midst of a desperate struggle to establish order among his motley troops, he was seized in February 1824 with some kind of fit, from which he partially recovered ; but his constitution was weakened by it, and on 9th April, after a wetting, he complained of rheumatic pains and feverishness. On the 15th he was obliged to keep his bed, from which he never rose. On the 18th April 1824 he lost consciousness, and on the following day he died. His body, transported to England, was buried at Hucknall Torkard.

The poetical genius of Byron is distinguished by two prominent characteristics : an intense self-consciousness, joined to a power, probably unequalled, of absorbing the social atmosphere about him and giving imaginative expression to it. Hence the spirit of his poetry is necessarily always lyrical ; at the same time the form of

its expression is, more often than not, epic or dramatic. He himself, in one shape or another, is the exponent of the sentiments to which he gives apparently dramatic utterance; but these sentiments ally themselves not unnaturally with the persons of pirates, lovers, philosophic travellers, cynical debauchees, or historic kings, doges, and other well-known characters, with all of which the reader, being familiar, can to some extent sympathise. How far Byron was conscious of his inevitable tendency to self-representation; how far he imagined himself to be simply a poetical creator, it is difficult to decide. On one occasion he writes to Murray: "As for poesy, mine is the *dream* of my sleeping passions; when they awake I cannot speak their language, only in their Somnambulism, and just now they are not dormant."[1] Again, when contemplating the composition of four tragedies, among which was to be one on Tiberius, he says, in confidence to his Journal: "I think that I could extract a something of *my* tragic, at least, out of the gloomy sequestration and age of the tyrant."[2] And once more, writing to Murray: "I have, you see, tried a Sketch in *Marino Faliero*; but many people think my talent '*essentially undramatic*,' and I am not at all clear that they are not right." On the other hand, when an effort was made by his "puritanical Committee" to persuade him to alter a speech of Lucifer in *Cain*, he refused:

"Gifford," he writes to Murray, "is too wise a man to think that such things can have any *serious* effect: who was ever altered by a poem? *I beg leave to observe, that there is no creed nor personal hypothesis of mine in all this*: but I was obliged to make Cain and Lucifer talk consistently, and surely this has always been permitted to poesy. Cain is a proud man: if Lucifer promised him kingdoms, etc., it would *elate* him: the object of the Demon is to *depress* him still further in his own estimation than he was before, by showing him infinite things, and his own abasement, till he falls into the frame of mind that leads to the Catastrophe, from mere *internal* irritation, *not* premeditation, or envy of *Abel* (which would have made him contemptible), but from the rage

[1] *Letters and Journal*, vol. iv. p. 43. [2] *Ibid.* vol. v. p. 189.

and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions, and which discharges rather against Life, and the Author of Life, than the mere living."[1]

Any impartial reader can see that this is sophistry, and that Byron, while professing to write dramatically, is really using the persons of Lucifer and Cain to express his own sentiments. It does not follow that he was not sincere in his apology: self-deception may have blinded him to the purely lyrical character of his compositions.

The truth is that, in everything he wrote, Byron shows himself the child of his age. With all his intense individuality, with a style essentially and idiomatically English, his poems have that universal air which makes them, like *The Sorrows of Werther* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, representative of the active revolutionary spirit in Europe. For the critic and the historian the interest mainly lies in determining how much of this total effect is contributed by the poet's personal genius, and how much by social forces acting on him from without. As I have already said, the twofold influence is strongly marked in his earliest production, *Hours of Idleness*. Here we see the Della Cruscan spirit expressed in the very self-consciousness of the title, and in the announcement of the authorship—"By George, Lord Byron, a Minor." This noble "minor" has already fathomed all the mysteries of life, and perceives its hollowness. He looks back on his schooldays as if he had arrived at the age of threescore years and ten. He paints in his "Childish Recollections" sentimental portraits of his chief friends at school. His ruined Abbey forms the subject of a mournful elegy, in which lamentations over the decay of the edifice mingle themselves naturally with reflections on the decline of his family and on his own position. Visions of ideal love are called up by memories of his Highland home, and of female acquaintances formed when he cannot have been more than ten years old. Other poems give prophetic indications of the satiric vein of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*,

[1] *Letters and Journal*, vol. v. p. 470.

and even of the cynicism of *Don Juan*: in all of these the foundation is laid in the intensely introspective mood which, at a later date, characterises the style of the third canto of *Childe Harold* and *Manfred*; and the sentiment expresses that eager ambition and thirst for praise, neutralised by contempt for self and society, which is confided to his later Journals and most intimate correspondence. Crude and boyish as is the diction of the following stanzas, the sincerity of feeling in them, as illustrated by the actual experiences of the writer, gives them a peculiar interest:

> Dear Becher, you tell me to mix with mankind;
> I cannot deny such a precept is wise;
> But retirement accords with the tone of my mind:
> I will not descend to a world I despise.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The fire, in the cavern of Etna concealed,
> Still mantles unseen in its secret recess;
> At length, in a volume terrific, revealed,
> No torrent can quench it, no bounds can repress.
>
> Oh! thus the desire, in my bosom, for fame,
> Bids me live, but to hope for Posterity's praise.
> Could I soar with the Phœnix on pinions of flame,
> With him I would wish to expire in the blaze.

Throughout the volume sympathy with romantic modern sentiment is closely associated with a sense of the writer's noble birth; moreover, a genuine admiration for the classical style of the eighteenth century qualifies his aspirations for unrestrained liberty of thought and emotion. This aesthetic admiration had taken form in the satire on his poetical contemporaries, entitled *British Bards*, which he intended to publish in 1807; and in his verses *To the Earl of Clare* may be noted the early growth of his capacity for applying critical canons to his own productions. Speaking in them of *The Edinburgh Review's* critique on Moore's poems he says:

> And yet, while Beauty's praise is thine,
> Harmonious favourite of the Nine!
> Repine not at thy lot.

Thy soothing lays may still be read,
When Persecution's arm is dead,
And critics are forgot.

Still I must yield those worthies merit,
Who chasten, with unsparing spirit,
Bad rhymes, and those who write them:
And though myself may be the next
By critic sarcasm to be vext,
I really will not fight them.

Perhaps they would do quite as well
To break the rudely sounding shell
Of such a young beginner:
He, who offends at pert nineteen,
Ere thirty may become, I ween,
A very harden'd sinner.

Vanity operated on him as it did on Pope; and just as the exquisite polish of the autobiographical *Epistle to Arbuthnot* was evolved out of a number of isolated satiric fragments, occasioned by attacks on Pope's person and poetry, so the desire for retaliation on *The Edinburgh Review* prompted Byron to reanimate the literary satire of *British Bards* with the life and fire which developed that work into *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.* It is noticeable, however, that the element of personality which runs through the later work, and was doubtless, to some extent, the cause of its success, is also present in *British Bards*; so that, though the fierceness of the lines on Jeffrey is in part to be attributed to soreness caused by the criticism of *The Edinburgh Review*, the character of the poem as a whole is determined by the class of motive that inspired *The Baviad* and *The Maeviad.* Many minor poets of the day were writing in this vein: the best of such productions are *The Simpliciad*—a satire against the style of conscious simplicity in verse introduced by Wordsworth—and *Epics of the Ton* by Lady Anne Hamilton; to both of which Byron was indebted. The animation of his own lines against Bowles, many of which are embodied in *British Bards*, is prompted by a sincere enthusiasm for Pope, as the greatest representative of the English classical school.

*Hints from Horace*, an imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*—somewhat resembling Pope's *Epistle to Augustus*—the original draft of which was written during Byron's absence from England, is a continuation of the same strain of abstract critical preference. So strongly was Byron imbued with the taste for the classical style, that in his later years he ranked this comparatively cold composition above *Childe Harold* and the romantic poems that immediately followed it. Nevertheless, during his travels he reverted, unconsciously perhaps, to the romantic vein inspiring *Hours of Idleness*, for which he now found a new vehicle of expression in the Spenser stanza. At intervals, through the eighteenth century, this metre had been used by poets whose genius was contemplative rather than active; and popular models of the style existed in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, Beattie's *Minstrel*, to which had recently been added Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming*, and Scott's *Vision of Don Roderick*. Except *The Minstrel*, the dominating motive of all of these compositions was "classical"; that is to say, the poet's imagination dwelt rather on the nature of the external object described than on the feelings which the object excited in his breast. Beattie, however, had plainly painted his own portrait in the figure of his Minstrel; and Byron, exaggerating the precedent, introduced into *Childe Harold*, under the mask of a quasi-feudal pilgrim, the feelings of imaginative *ennui*, lyrically expressed in *Hours of Idleness*. He took the precaution of declaring, in a preface, that the motive of the poem was quite impersonal:

> "A fictitious character," he says, "is introduced for the sake of giving some connection to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity. It has been suggested to me by friends, on whose opinions I set a high value, that in this fictitious character, 'Childe Harold,' I may incur the suspicion of having intended some real personage: this I beg leave, once for all, to disclaim—Harold is the child of imagination, for the purpose I have stated."

And in an "addition" which he made to his preface

after the poem had been widely reviewed, he proceeded, in the manner which afterwards became habitual with him, to emphasise his disavowal of self-portraiture, by impugning the justice of the frequent criticism that the character of the hero was not dramatically correct. He maintained, on the contrary, that the figure of his pilgrim was conceived with a moral intention:

> I now leave "Childe Harold" to live his day such as he is; it had been more agreeable, and certainly more easy, to have drawn an amiable character. It had been easy to varnish over his faults, to make him do more and express less, but he never was intended as an example, further than to show, that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones, and that even the beauties of nature, and the stimulus of travel (except ambition the most powerful of all excitements) are lost on a soul so constituted, or rather misdirected.

He did not choose to remember that this was exactly the portrait of himself which he had published in *Hours of Idleness*:

> Weary of love, of life, devoured with spleen,
> I rest a perfect Timon, not nineteen.[1]

Had Childe Harold been merely the self-painted portrait of a dissipated young nobleman, the poem in which he is the prominent figure would never have profoundly interested the world. It became famous because it was *representative*; because Byron, without any conscious artistic aim, had taken the right poetic way to give expression to the feeling of *ennui* which, since Horace Walpole confessed to it, had been spreading far and wide through cultivated society.[2] From this point of view the character of the Childe may be considered to have an objective reality which renders it dramatic. Byron, laying the ground-work of his poem in descriptions of foreign travel, opened a new world in which the imagination, weary of order at home, could expatiate with freedom; and when, stimulated partly by the desire for literary fame,

[1] "Childish Recollections."

[2] Compare Walpole's letter on the subject cited in vol. v. p. 361.

partly by an impulse to give utterance to his own restless passions, he again entered upon the path of poetic creation, he instinctively chose a similar vehicle for representing the emotions of the unquiet society about him.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* the poet confined himself to reflection: *The Giaour*, on the other hand, was a narrative of action, fragmentary and disconnected, no doubt, but still intelligible as far as concerned the feelings it professed to describe—love, revenge, remorse. Of this poem and of its immediate successors, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara*, we may say confidently that the inspiring motive was the restless desire for self-expression, and that the external form which all of them assumed was the result of a constant and morbid introspection. At the same time the apparently dramatic character under which this introspection was veiled fell in most felicitously with the tendency of the public taste. *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, and *The Bride of Abydos* are professedly stories of that Eastern life in which, since Sir William Jones began to familiarise society with Oriental imagery, English fancy loved to lose itself.

"Stick to the East," writes Byron to Moore—"the oracle, Stael, told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted; but from the East we have nothing but Southey's unsaleables,—and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting only their most outrageous fictions." [1]

A tale of Turkish love, death, and revenge, shrouded in an atmosphere of mystery, but, in its powerful expression of emotion, hinting at the reality of the incidents related, and raising the suspicion that the poet was the chief actor in his own romance, was precisely the form of poetry for which the public imagination craved. Byron fell into this vein naturally and instinctively. It is evident that, in all the poems mentioned, he traded on some abiding passion, over which he morbidly brooded, and for which he sought relief by projecting it into a quasi-dramatic shape. Thus he writes to Gifford of *The Bride of Abydos*:

[1] *Byron's Works, Letters and Journals*, ii. 255.

You have been good enough to look at a thing of mine in MS.—a Turkish story, and I should feel gratified if you would do it the same favour in its probationary state of printing. It was written, I cannot say for amusement, nor "obliged by hunger and request of friends," but in a state of mind from circumstances which occasionally occur to "us youth," that rendered it necessary for me to apply my mind to something, any thing but reality; and under this not very brilliant inspiration it was composed.[1]

In *The Giaour* the introspective feeling at the root of the poem is thrown into the external form of confession: in *The Corsair* and *Lara* it embodies itself in the description of the leading character: in *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*, the last poems written before Byron's separation from his wife, the dominant motive of self-expression appears, in the one case, in the feelings ascribed to Alp, and, in the other, in the morbid selection of a subject, which anticipates the crime treated of in *Manfred*. Up to the time of his leaving England Byron was content to throw over his own personality the veil of mysterious romance; and though, after the public scandal of the separation, he did not hesitate to rend the veil asunder in the verses entitled "Fare thee well," "Stanzas to Augusta," the opening stanzas of the third canto of *Childe Harold*, and to a certain extent in *The Dream*, he still continued in *Manfred* to emphasise in appearance the *impersonal* side of his invention.

"I forgot to mention to you," he writes to Murray on 15th February 1817, "that a kind of Poem in dialogue (in blank verse) or drama from which 'The Incantation' is an extract, begun last summer in Switzerland, is finished; it is in three acts; but of a very wild, metaphysical, and inexplicable kind. . . . You may perceive . . . that I have no great opinion of this *piece of phantasy*."

Byron's personality is stamped on every line of this poem. As Mr. Coleridge justly writes of it: "The *motif* of *Manfred* is remorse—eternal suffering for inexpiable crime";[2] and all the evidence points to the conclusion

[1] Letter to William Gifford, November 13, 1813. He says practically the same thing to Moore in his letter of November 30, 1813.

[2] *Byron's Works* (*Poetry*), vol. iv. p. 82.

that Manfred's mood was a reflection of Byron's morbid brooding over some unrevealed act, with which his conscience and imagination continued perpetually to torture him. It would be equally useless and mischievous to inquire minutely into the nature of this crime, but historic truth requires attention to be drawn to the poet's intention with regard to the first plan of *The Bride of Abydos*, his declaration to Gifford of the mood in which that poem was written, the selection of the subject of *Parisina*, and the whole drift of *Manfred*, in connection with what he himself says of the inspiration of the poem,[1] and a long-unpublished (but now printed[2]) letter to Mrs. Leigh, written on May the 17th, 1819, at the time when the conception of *Manfred* was in his mind. No student of this powerful and seemingly dramatic representation of "remorse" can doubt that it is—like the "confession" in *The Giaour*, and the sympathetic character-painting of *The Corsair* and *Lara*—the imaginative product of self-expression and personal experience. As to the dramatic form of the poem, there seems to be little doubt that the figure of the hero was suggested to Byron after "Monk" Lewis had translated to him Goethe's *Faust*; but the character of the drama is so largely of the nature of soliloquy, and is so completely coloured with the scenery of "the Staubach and the Jungfrau," that the whole effect remains entirely original. It is observable in *Manfred*, as in *Lara*, that for the incidents of action, such as they are, Byron is generally indebted to the inventions of others, which he adapts to the character and situation of his own hero. In *Lara* he borrowed from Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* the "mystery" surrounding the character of Montoni, as well as the description of the duel between the latter and the Count: the "peasant's tale" of the murder of Sir Ezzelin is grounded on a passage in Roscoe's *Life and Pontificate of*

[1] "It was the *Staubach* and the *Jungfrau* and *something else*, much more than *Faustus*, that made me write *Manfred*" (Letter to Murray of June 7, 1820).

[2] *Astarte*, the title of the volume in which this letter appears, by the late Lord Lovelace, is now withdrawn from circulation.

*Leo the Tenth*, describing the assassination and burial of the Duke of Gandia. In *Manfred* many of the supernatural incidents are taken directly from Goethe's *Faust*, Beckford's *Vathek*, Plutarch's Life of Pausanias, and Ennapius's Life of the philosopher Iamblichus. A literary practice of this kind made it easy for Byron to offer a plausible defence when his critics accused him of self-representation.

When we look away from this habit of romantic self-expression to its effect in detail upon Byron's art, the most observable feature in his narrative work is its comparative formlessness. In *The Giaour*, for example, the first of his essentially narrative poems, it is difficult to discover, from the fragmentary way in which the story is told, whether the different speakers are respectively the Giaour, the Turkish fisherman, or the poet himself. In *The Corsair* and *Lara* there is nothing in the structure of the tales to explain the part played by the principal actors, on the painting of whose characters an amount of labour is expended out of all proportion to the incidents related; and in a lesser degree the same observation applies to *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Siege of Corinth*. Reflection and description predominate enormously over action in *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, though both are professedly stories of something done. All that Childe Harold does is to move from one place to another, and to meditate upon the scenes before him for the moment; in *Don Juan* the no longer veiled personality of the poet causes him for ever to pause in his narrative for the purpose of satiric soliloquy. Of all these tendencies in his poetry Byron was fully aware, nor was it so much reckless bravado, as a sincere critical perception of the value of classical form, that made him speak disparagingly of the works of himself and his contemporaries in comparison with the poetry of Pope.

Of the form of his dramas little need be said. These were never intended for representation on the stage. The lyrical motive of self-expression can easily be discerned in them all; but as to the observance of the "unities," on which Byron piques himself, in *Marino*

*Faliero*, for example, we may infer that it was in reality by no means a cold artistic preference for the classical over the romantic form that made him take his stand on the "orthodox" principle, but a perception that the French dramatic system was better suited for his own purpose than the English. In the English poetic drama plot and action, with an attendant development of character, are the essential features; in *Marino Faliero* these are conspicuous by their absence. There everything depends upon motive and intention. Through all the five acts nothing of what is meditated is accomplished; the characters, except that of the Doge, are insignificant. The Dogaressa is introduced merely for the sake of rhetorical antithesis; the part of Israel Bertuccio, after Faliero the most prominent conspirator, is entirely conventional; the patrician Lioni is merely a reflection of one of Byron's transient moods. The strength of the drama, therefore, lies necessarily in the speeches expressive of motive; and in this respect it resembles the plays of Corneille and Racine rather than those of Shakespeare. The unity of place, though it in no way promotes simplicity of action, affords a certain critical excuse for the length of the soliloquies and the dialogue. Where the business of the *dramatis personae* is not to act but to talk about the situation, it is unnecessary for them to shift any of the various scenes more than a few hundred yards from the Doge's palace.

Looking to the character of Byron's diction and metre, it is interesting to observe with what closeness these adapted themselves to the constant changes of his emotional mood. The groundwork of his diction is always the colloquial English of the day, as spoken in the highest classes. In a passage which I have already cited in a different context,[1] he criticises the absence of life and movement in the poetry of most of his contemporaries, and ascribes it to their exclusion from all participation in the action, passions, and sentiments of the ruling society. And he continues:

[1] See ante, pp. 122-3.

Moore and I, the one by circumstances, and the other by birth, happened to be free of the corporation, and to have entered into its pulses and passions, *quarum partes fuimus*. Both of us have learnt by this much which nothing else could have taught us.[1]

His view of "high life," however, shifted perpetually according to the treatment he received from society. Extreme self-consciousness inclined him to dislike company, and to develop in his verse the contemplative, disdainful mood of the Solitary: on the other hand, literary success, and the boundless adulation that followed it, turned his imagination into the sphere of romantic action. Driven from this social position into exile by domestic scandals, his genius once more prompted him to contemplate society from without, and to represent his own quarrel with it, either directly in a cynical and satiric, or indirectly in a dramatic form. The following examples of poetical expression, taken from his work produced under the influence of these different moods, will illustrate the effect of his transient emotions on his style. The first extract is from the second canto of *Childe Harold*; and any one can see that in the first two cantos the mode of expression is much calmer and more regular than in the third, and even than in the fourth. Description of natural objects predominates; and the moral is of a universal kind little affected by personal considerations. The lines on Marathon are a fine sample of composition inspired by this comparatively impersonal temper:

> The flying Mede, his shaftless broken bow—
> The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;
> Mountains above—Earth's, Ocean's plain below—
> Death in the front, Destruction in the rear!
> Such was the scene—what now remaineth here?
> What sacred Trophy marks the hallowed ground,
> Recording Freedom's smile and Asia's tear?
> The rifled urn, the violated mound,
> The dust thy courser's hoof, rude stranger! spurns around.

In all the poems published between the years 1812-

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray), *Letters and Journal*, vol. v. pp. 362-3.

1815 may be noted an imagery based upon recollections of the East, mixed with a passionate self-portraiture veiled under figures of adventurous romance. The metre chosen is either the octosyllabic iambic, mixed occasionally with anapæsts, after the fashion introduced by Coleridge in *Christabel*, and popularised by Walter Scott, or else the heroic decasyllable with a rhythm expanded beyond the limits of the couplet, and accelerated to suit the movements of "une âme qui se tourmente, un esprit violent."[1] The following passage from *Lara* is representative of Byron's style at this epoch:

> 'Twas strange—in youth all action and all life,
> Burning for pleasure, not averse from strife;
> Woman—the Field—the Ocean, all that gave
> Promise of gladness, peril, or a grave,
> In vain he tried—he ransacked all below,
> And found his recompense in joy or woe,
> No tame, trite medium; for his feelings sought
> In that intenseness an escape from thought:
> The Tempest of his heart in scorn had gazed
> On that the feebler elements had raised;
> The Rapture of his heart had looked on high,
> And asked if greater dwelt beyond the sky:
> Chained to excess, the slave of each extreme,
> How woke he from the wildness of that dream!
> Alas! he told not—but he did awake
> To curse the withered heart that would not break.

In most of these poems the style, though always careless, often prosaic, and sometimes obscure, is swift and flowing, in harmony with the spirit of action by which it is animated. But in the third canto of *Childe Harold* when, after his separation from his wife, he again takes up the position of moralist *ab extra*, the original features of his genius are strangely modified. Personal emotion, mingling with contemplative philosophy, elevates his thought into grandeur, and distorts it with agony; hence in the following passage—following the magnificent lines on the Battle of Waterloo—it will be observed that where the poet appears to be simply reflecting upon an external object, his expression

[1] *Byron's Works, Letters and Journal*, vol. v. p. 196.

inadequately conveys his meaning; and it is only when his verse becomes the vehicle of his personal feelings that the selection of words and images approaches perfection:

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,
Whose Spirit, antithetically mixed,
One moment of the mightiest, and again
On little objects with like firmness fixed;
Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;
For Daring made thy rise as fall: thou seekst
Even now to reassume the imperial mien,
And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene!

Conqueror and Captive of the Earth art thou:
She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name
Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,
Who wooed thee once, thy Vassal, and became
The flatterer of thy fierceness—till thou wert
A God unto thyself; nor less the same
To the astounded kingdoms all inert,
Who deemed thee for a time whate'er thou didst assert.

Oh, more or less than man—in high or low—
Battling with nations, flying from the field;
Now making monarchs' necks thy footstool, now
More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield;
An Empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,
But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,
However deeply in men's spirits skilled,
Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of War,
Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star.

Yet well thy soul hath brooked the turning tide
With that untaught innate philosophy,
Which, be it Wisdom, Coldness, or deep Pride,
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy,
When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast smiled
With a sedate and all-enduring eye;—
When Fortune fled her spoiled and favourite child,
He stood unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled.

Sager than in thy fortunes; for in them
Ambition steeled thee on too far to show
That just habitual scorn, which could contemn

Men and their thoughts ; 'twas wise to feel, not so
To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,
And spurn the instruments thou wert to use
Till they were turned unto thine overthrow :
'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose ;
So it hath proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.

If, like a tower upon a headlong rock,
Thou hadst been made to stand or fall alone,
Such scorn of man had helped to brave the shock ;
But men's thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne,
*Their* admiration thy best weapon shone ;
The part of Philip's son was thine, not then
(Unless aside thy Purple had been thrown)
Like stern Diogenes to mock at men—
For sceptred Cynics Earth were far too wide a den.

But Quiet to quick bosoms is a Hell
And *there* hath been thy bane ; there is a fire
And motion of the Soul which will not dwell
In its own narrow being, but aspire
Beyond the fitting medium of desire ;
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest ; a fever at the core,
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

This makes the madmen who have made men mad
By their contagion ; Conquerors and Kings,
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add
Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,
And are themselves the fools to those they fool ;
Envied, yet how unenviable ! what stings
Are theirs ! One breast laid open were a school
Which would unteach Mankind the lust to shine or rule.

Their breath is agitation, and their life
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,
And yet so nursed and bigoted to strife,
That should their days, surviving perils past,
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast
With sorrow and supineness, and so die ;
Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste
With its own flickering, or a sword laid by,
Which eats into itself and rusts ingloriously.

He who ascends to mountain-tops shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow ;
He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.

Though high *above* the Sun of Glory glow,
And far *beneath* the Earth and Ocean spread,
*Round* him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
Contending tempests on his naked head,
And thus reward the toils which to those summits led.[1]

The first observation to be made on this is, that, for ethical and didactic purposes, where epigrammatic terseness is required, the metre adopted is scarcely a satisfactory instrument. The length of the Spenser stanzas encourages diffuseness, and, compared with the strong lines at the close of Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* or Goldsmith's *Traveller*, Byron's moralising rhetoric seems languid and pointless. The frequency of the rhymes leads him into weakness (as in the line: "Their admiration thy best weapon *shone*") or unnecessary expansion; and though the substance of the moral is sound and the observation just, the imagery in which it is clothed wants clearness of outline: the poet's impatience prevents him from subduing his thought to the requirements of his verse. Awkwardness of idioms ("nor less the same," for instance); ambiguities or inaccuracies, like "More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield"; confusion of metaphors (*e.g.* "Ambition *steeled*[2] thee on *too far*"); obscurities of epigram (as in the line: "For sceptred Cynics Earth were far too wide a den")—such faults, constantly recurring, mar the effect of the poetical sermon. Throughout it, after his usual fashion, Byron is thinking less of Napoleon than of the likeness between himself and the fallen Emperor: hence it is not until he arrives at the climax, obviously describing his own intimate feelings, that he attains, in the last four stanzas, perfect clearness and simplicity of expression.

His genius encounters less difficulty, and moves more easily, in the style of *ottava rima*, adapted from the serio-comic poets of Italy. From Pulci to Ariosto all this line of poets, as I have already said,[3] had taken for their

[1] *Childe Harold*, Canto iii. 36-45.

[2] Byron's carelessness in the correction of proofs would warrant the conjecture that he wrote "steered," with perhaps a recollection of Dryden's character of Achitophel, who "would steer too near the sands, to boast his wit."

[3] See vol. ii. p. 261.

themes romantic action, but had described it in the attitude of spectators; and Byron, who had from the first shown an imaginative sympathy with the romantic movement in English society, skilfully availed himself, after his expulsion from that society, of the Italian ironic style, as an instrument of satire on the hypocrisies of sentiment in his own country. *Don Juan*, epic in form, is lyrical in spirit. Conscious of the character in which he writes, Byron says of his style with apparent *naïveté*:

> If I have any fault it is digression,
> Leaving my people to proceed alone,
> While I soliloquise beyond expression.[1]

Almost the only actions in which his "people" are engaged are love-adventures: he constantly interrupts himself in the midst of his soliloquies to take blame for his incorrigible habit; and, on such occasions, he gives the reader a glimpse alike of his real motives and of the state of feeling in which he writes, as, for example:

> But I am apt to grow too metaphysical;
> "The time is out of joint,"—and so am I;
> I quite forget this poem's merely quizzical,
> And deviate into matters rather dry.
> I ne'er decide what I shall say, and this I call
> Much too poetical: men should know why
> They write, and for what end; but, note or text,
> I never know the word which will come next.[2]

In this there is no affectation: it is the genuine reflection of the reckless line of conduct, deliberately followed during his Venetian epoch, and of the self-torturing reflection from which he endeavoured to find escape through the channels of self-expression. As he says in another place:

> I won't describe,—that is, if I can help
> Description; and I won't reflect,—that is,
> If I can stave off thought, which—as a whelp
> Clings to its teat—sticks to me through the abyss
> Of this odd labyrinth; or as the kelp
> Holds by the rock; or as a lover's kiss
> Drains its first draught of lips:—but, as I said,
> I *won't* philosophise, and *will* be read.[3]

[1] *Don Juan*, Canto iii. 96. [2] *Ibid.* Canto ix. 41. [3] *Ibid.* Canto x. 28.

As a natural consequence of this resolution the diction of *Don Juan* is as colloquial as any metrical style can be; and the artistic efforts of the poet are restricted almost entirely to the choice of rhymes. The skill with which unexpected double or treble (*sdrucciolo*) rhymes are made to fall into their proper place in the sentence is generally admirable: here are a few examples:

> He could perhaps have passed the Hellespont,
> As once (a feat on which ourselves we prided)
> Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did.[1]
>
> There's not a sea the passenger e'er pukes in
> Turns up more dangerous breakers than the Euxine.[2]
>
> I'll prove that such the opinion of the critic is
> From Aristotle *passim.*—See Ποιητικῆς.[3]
>
> Because the publisher declares, in sooth,
> Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is
> To pass, than those two cantos into families.[4]

This facility of rhyming was not exhausted in isolated efforts: the following passage shows with what idiomatic precision Byron's unique genius could sustain the cynical satiric style through a whole series of stanzas.

> "Where is the World?" cries Young, "at *eighty*—Where
> The World in which a man was born?" Alas!
> Where is the world of *eight* years past? *'Twas there*—
> I look for it—'tis gone, a globe of glass!
> Cracked, shivered, vanished, scarcely gazed on, ere
> A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.
> Statesmen, Chiefs, Orators, Queens, Patriots, Kings,
> And Dandies—all are gone on the Wind's wings.
>
> Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows!
> Where little Castlereagh? The Devil can tell!
> Where Grattan, Curran, Sheridan,—all those
> Who bound the Bar or Senate in their spell?
> Where is the unhappy Queen with all her woes?
> And where the Daughter whom the Isles loved well?
> Where are those martyred Saints the Five per Cents?
> And where—oh, where the devil are the Rents?

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[1] *Don Juan*, Canto ii. 105. [2] *Ibid.* Canto v. 5.
[3] *Ibid.* Canto iii. 111. [4] *Ibid.* Canto iv. 97.

Where's Brummell? Dished. Where's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled.
Where's Whitbread? Romilly? Where's George the Third?
Where is his will? (That's not so soon unriddled.)
And where is "Fum" the Fourth, our "royal bird"?
Gone down, it seems, to Scotland to be fiddled
Unto by Sawney's violin, we have heard:
"Caw me, Caw thee"—for six months hath been hatching
This scene of royal itch and loyal scratching.

Where is Lord This? And where my Lady That?
The honourable Mistresses and Misses?
Some laid aside like an old Opera hat,
Married, unmarried, and remarried: (this is
An evolution oft performed of late.)
Where are the Dublin shouts—and London hisses?
Where are the Grenvilles? Turned as usual. Where
My friends the Whigs? Exactly where they were.

Where are the Lady Carolines and Franceses?
Divorced or doing thereanent. Ye annals
So brilliant, where the list of routs and dances is,—
Thou *Morning Post*, sole record of the panels
Broken in carriages, and all the phantasies
Of fashion—say what streams now fill those channels?
Some die, some fly, some languish on the Continent,
Because the times have hardly left them *one* tenant.

Some who once set their caps at cautious dukes,
Have taken up at length with younger brothers:
Some heiresses have bit at sharpers' hooks:
Some maids have been made wives, some merely mothers:
Others have lost their fresh and fairy looks:
In short the list of alterations bothers.
There's little strange in this, but something strange is
The unusual quickness of these common changes.

Talk not of seventy years as age; in seven
I have seen more changes, down from monarchs to
The humblest individual under heaven,
Than might suffice a moderate century through.
I knew that nought was lasting, but now even
Change grows too changeable, without being new:
Nought's permanent among the human race,
Except the Whigs *not* getting into place.[1]

In judging of Byron's dramatic style, if justice is to be done to it, we ought always to bear in mind the

[1] *Don Juan*, Canto xi. 76-82.

lyrical mood which is its inspiring motive. He has sometimes been criticised as if he were primarily an artist. But the cold principle "Art for art's sake" was abhorrent to his genius. He was the Avatar of the revolutionary movement, whose every thought was prompted by revolt against the moral postulates of society and steeped in the passionate desire for self-expression. To expect a spirit so active and impatient to be always in search of words answering to shades and niceties of perception, is to set up a false standard of judgment. Matthew Arnold cites the following, from a speech of Lucifer in *Cain*, as an illustration of Byron's "unknowingness and want of humour":

> Thy human mind hath scarcely grasp to gather
> The little I have shown thee into calm
> And clear thought: and *thou* wouldst go on aspiring
> To the great double Mysteries! the *two Principles*![1]

Of course if Byron had intended *Cain* to be a real drama, fit for representation on the stage, to make the Devil refer to the Manichæan philosophy would have been an absurdity; though the poet might still have sheltered himself behind the authority of Shakespeare, who, in his *Troilus and Cressida*, makes Hector quote Aristotle. But in this, as in all his plays, Byron is so plainly using the dramatic form merely as a vehicle for his own thought, that to judge it by an absolute standard of criticism seems the height of pedantry. Gifford pleased Byron by declaring the first act of *Marino Faliero* to be "genuine English"; and so it is. The simplicity, the clearness, the nervous strength of the diction, and the free movement of the blank verse, are evidence of the amplitude of the poet's vocabulary, and of his acquaintance with the best models of English dramatic writing. Though rapidity of composition led him sometimes into grammatical errors,—such as

> There is no traitor like
> *He* whose domestic treason plants the poniard
> Within the breast which trusted to his truth,[2]

[1] *Cain*, Act ii. Sc. 2, 401-4. See M. Arnold, *Poetry of Byron*, p. xxii.
[2] *Marino Faliero*, Act iv. Sc. 1, 302.

or

> Let *He* who made thee answer that[1]—

the swiftness and strength of his rhetorical style carry the attention away from these minute blots. In the same way the general vastness of his conceptions swallows up petty quibbles of diction, *e.g.*:

> We leave a nobler monument than Egypt
> Hath piled in her brick mountains, o'er dead kings
> Or kine[2]—

and metrical jingles which M. Arnold cites as a proof of Byron's insensibility "to the true artist's fine passion for the correct use and consummate management of words," *e.g.*:

> All shall be void,
> Destroyed.[3]

The recklessness, the slovenliness, and the frequent obscurity of Byron's dramatic diction must be judged as features in that character by force of which he was what he was, in poetry as well as in life, and which unceasingly insisted on self-expression even in poetical situations of apparently purely objective interest; as in the following passage of *Marino Faliero* where the Doge addresses his plebeian fellow-conspirators:

> DOGE. Ye, though you know and feel our mutual mass
> Of many wrongs, even ye are ignorant
> What fatal poison to the springs of life,
> To human ties and all that's good and dear,
> Lurks in the present institutes of Venice:
> All these men were my friends; I loved them, they
> Requited honourably my regards;
> We served and fought; we smiled and wept in concert;
> We revelled or we sorrowed side by side;
> We made alliances of blood and marriage;
> We grew in years and honours fairly,—till
> Their own desire, not my ambition, made
> Them choose me for their Prince, and then farewell!
> Farewell all social memory! all thoughts
> In common! and sweet bonds which link old friendships,
> When the survivors of long years and actions,
> Which now belong to history, soothe the days

[1] *Cain*, Act ii. Sc. 2, 88. [2] *Sardanapalus*, Act v. Sc. 1, 483-4.
[3] *Heaven and Earth*, Part i. Sc. 3, 94-5. See M. Arnold, *Poetry of Byron*, pp. xiv. xv.

Which yet remain by treasuring each other,
And never meet but each beholds the mirror
Of half a century on his brother's brow,
And sees a hundred beings, now in earth,
Flit round them whispering of the days gone by,
And seeming not all dead, as long as two
Of the brave, joyous, reckless, glorious, band,
Which once were one and many, still retain
A breath to sigh for them, a tongue to speak
Of deeds that else were silent, save on marble—
*Oimé! Oimé!*—and must I do this deed?

I. BERTUCCIO. My Lord, you are much moved: it is not now
That such things must be dwelt upon.

DOGE. Your patience
A moment—I recede not: mark with me
The gloomy vices of this government.
From the hour they made me Doge, the Doge THEY *made* me—
Farewell the past! I died to all that had been,
Or rather they to me: no friends, no kindness,
No privacy of life—all were cut off:
They came not near me—such approach gave umbrage;
They could not love me—such was not the law;
They thwarted me—'twas the state's policy;
They baffled me—'twas a patrician's duty;
They wronged me—for such was to right the state;
They could not right me—that would give suspicion;
So that I was a slave to my own subjects;
So that I was a foe to my own friends;
Begirt with spies for guards, with robes for power,
With pomp for freedom, gaolers for a council,
Inquisitors for friends, and Hell for life!
I had only one fount of quiet left,
And *that* they poisoned! My pure household gods
Were shivered on my hearth, and o'er their shrine
Sat grinning Ribaldry and sneering Scorn.[1]

It is not too much to say that these lines, read in connection with the incidents of Byron's life, and with his own judgment of them as expressed in his letters and journals, condense into themselves a complete abstract of his poetical as well as of his moral character. He is above all other poets the spoiled child of genius. Of ancient and noble lineage, born with passions and ambitions, equally

[1] *Marino Faliero*, Act iii. Sc. 2, 314-64.

precocious and powerful, he sought from a very early age to realise by the exertion of will all that his mind conceived as desirable. Thwarted by external forces, his spirit turned inwards and preyed on its own thoughts. A rigid training in the doctrines of extreme Calvinism, while it drove him into rebellion against the dogmas of the Christian faith, rooted in his mind the idea of Predestination, which his introspective imagination associated inseparably with the history of his family. Self-conscious vanity, often the companion of great genius, produced in him an anti-social shyness, and inclined him to solitary meditation; consciousness of the possession of high powers, on the other hand, made him passionately desirous of active fame: the conflict in his mind between these contrary forces resulted in the forms of morbid self-expression which are the characteristic feature of his poetry. A passage in his correspondence with Miss Milbanke, written when he was the idol of the fashionable world, seems to be a faithful revelation of his most intimate feelings:

> I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect. This may look like affectation, but it is my real opinion. It is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake. They say poets never or rarely go *mad*. Cowper and Collins are instances to the contrary (but Cowper was no poet). It is, however, to be remarked that they rarely do, but are generally so near it that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating and preventing the disorder. I prefer the talents of action—of war, of the senate, of even of science,—to all the speculations of those mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean religiously but fancifully) and spectators of this apathy. Disgust and perhaps incapacity have rendered me now a mere spectator; but I have occasionally mixed in the active and tumultuous departments of existence, and on these alone my recollection rests with any satisfaction, though not the best parts of it.[1]

But no form of action recognised as lawful by a free society was adequate for an imagination constantly

[1] Letter to Miss Milbanke of 10th November 1813.

striving to convert its own visions into reality. As he said of Napoleon :

> There is a fire
> And motion of the soul which will not dwell
> In its own narrow being ;

and once confined within limits imposed on him by law as well as custom, it was morally inevitable that he should break out of bounds. So long as he was left at liberty by a society which flattered him, he could satisfy his scorn of his surroundings by romantic portraits of the wicked self seen in his own imagination ; but so soon as judgment was pronounced against him for his violation of established order, he constituted himself the satirist of his judges. Maintaining his attitude of self-condemnation, previously exerted against professedly fictitious personages like Childe Harold, he altogether refused to recognise the judicial authority of a social court which he asserted to be the representative of Cant and Hypocrisy.

It is the mixture in his genius of the twofold principle of contemplation and action that makes Byron the most complete representative of the romantic movement in English Poetry. His temper was equally removed from the monastic Nature-worship of the Solitary, which Wordsworth sought to erect into a religious standard suited to the wants of historic society, and from the active idealism of Shelley, which aimed at overthrowing the institutions of that society in favour of Utopias existing only in a poetical imagination. He was at one and the same time the romantic satirist of social romanticism, and a rebel against the established code of religion and morals which Wordsworth and the Lake School, after depreciating it in their youth, came to regard as the bulwark of all that was valuable in society. Byron's fundamental error of judgment lay in identifying this code with the "cant" of that portion of society of which he was himself a leading representative, and the corruption of which he was justified in satirising. Catiline was a type of the vices paramount in the governing society of Rome ; yet his

conspiracy failed because the genius of Rome had a vitality deeper and wider than the character of those who ruled it. In the same way Byron "free," as he said, "of the corporation" of English oligarchical society, heir of its reckless wit, master of its polished idioms, failed to perceive that the Puritan leaven, mixed in that, as in every other class in the community, was the product of ancient historic forces, the strength of which could not be measured by any single imagination. Like Catiline, he dashed himself against a solid body of national sentiment, and met the Roman's fate. He always writes as a nobleman, and avails himself, for his own purposes, of that refined colloquial style which, since the Restoration, had established a dominant influence in English poetry. Hence the vast effect which his genius produced upon the taste of his generation. In so far as he represented the great qualities of an aristocracy which for more than a hundred years had swayed the destinies of England, his verse reflects, with extreme brilliance, the characteristics of the English classical style. His passionate love of political Liberty, illustrated in his lines on "The Isles of Greece" and in the opening of *The Giaour*; his lofty ethical vein, exemplified in the grand stanzas on the Battle of Waterloo and the address to the Ocean in *Childe Harold*; the often beautiful flow of his lyric verse, as in "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold," or "She walks in beauty like the night"; —in all these directions his genius has produced work of imperishable excellence.

But he was at the same time the representative of the oligarchic spirit in its decline; and, viewed in this light, his poetry is of unequal merit. As the satirist of aristocratic corruption in the days of the Regency, he is remarkably successful. His transformation of the light Whistlecraft style, introduced by Frere, into an instrument of reflection on manners is masterly in its skill; nor is the well-bred gaiety of *Beppo* marred by the savage cynicism which runs riot in *Don Juan*. As a retaliation for an unprovoked attack the satire in

*The Vision of Judgment* is justifiable; and the execution of the mixed design of that poem leaves nothing to be desired.

Byron, however, was for a time the poetical spokesman of fashionable Romanticism in English society; and, as the groundwork of that taste was essentially shallow and unreal, it is this part of his work which shows the least vitality. In all the poems published between his return from his travels and the separation from his wife, he too evidently attempts to disguise his own personality under a romantic mask. No doubt to the "Lady Carolines and Lady Franceses" of the day the airs and graces of his Childe Harolds, and Conrades, and Laras, were irresistible; but to a generation which has cares of its own to occupy it they seem only the attitudes of a poser. Byron, in himself and his misfortunes, will always be an object of interest; but Byron exhibiting himself as a dandy outlaw before a society which he despises makes a somewhat contemptible figure. A consciousness of the want of substance in his own romantic creations no doubt intensified the cynical reaction of *Don Juan*.

The striking contrast between the genius of Byron and that of Wordsworth affords an instructive comment on the critical theory of poetry formulated by the latter, which I have already discussed. Byron carried Wordsworth's individualising principle to its furthest logical extreme. His own thoughts, his own sentiments, his own passions, were invariably the subject of his verse. Like Wordsworth he was driven by circumstances to find solace in solitary communion with Nature; but, unlike him, his soul in the midst of Nature was devoured with the craving for action and the thirst of social ambition. While the Lake poet, after discarding his early revolutionary idealism, satisfied himself with framing a philosophy of Nature based on quiet contemplation, Byron at first attempted to give a personal and romantic dress to revolutionary sentiment, and afterwards, when his rupture with society was complete, sought for suitable epic and dramatic forms of verse in which to

express his contempt for the moral standards of his country. This opposition in their respective attitudes produced a marked antagonism of poetical style. Wordsworth's purely contemplative principle led him almost inevitably into prosaic modes of expression : Byron, on the contrary, in his quarrel with his countrymen, never failed to assimilate forms of poetry consecrated by historic usage, and to express himself in metrical idioms which, while based on the conversation of the most polished contemporary society, were capable of being naturalised in long-established forms of English verse. The genius of both poets was essentially lyrical. High as it was in each case, in view of the fact that the greatest poetry must in some sense always be a reflection of social action, neither of them can be said to have attained to the rank of the "three mighty men"—Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton. Their poetry lacks the "universal" element, in the widest sense of the word, so largely present in the work of their great predecessors. Wordsworth's excessive indulgence of individuality ended in imaginative monasticism ; Byron's betrayed him into moral anarchy.

# CHAPTER IX

## ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

### The Poetry of Revolutionary Idealism: Percy Bysshe Shelley

The genius of Shelley on one side resembles that of Wordsworth, on another that of Byron; but the principles on which he acted were carried to such a height that, in its total result, his poetry remains unique, and serves as a mirror solely of the extraordinary personality by which it was inspired. Like Wordsworth, he believed in the power of the mind to re-create Nature according to its own image; but whereas Wordsworth, when he found that his revolutionary theories led in practice to consequences which he had not foreseen, retraced his steps, and, in his latter days, adapted his ideas to suit his social environment, Shelley continued to the end of his life to view Nature, Men, and the institutions of Society through the modifying light of the revolutionary philosophy which he assumed as the starting-point of action. Like Byron, the practice of his principles necessarily brought him into collision with the established opinions of historic society; like him, he persisted in his rebellion against them; but Byron did not question the legitimate authority of what was established: his rebellion was that of a Catiline—inspired by pride, passion, and contempt for his fellows—against what he held to be the cant of the community which formed the court of judgment: Shelley's revolt was in favour of abstract ideas, which he

strove to make the rule of conduct, in the place of those that he believed to be the fruits of ignorance and the instruments of tyranny. His unqualified assertion of the rights of individual opinion as opposed to general judgment necessarily demanded an abstract mode of expression, so that while Wordsworth and Byron, in their respective styles, keep in touch with the common sense of men, Shelley's mode of composition is that of a disembodied spirit, seeking so to etherealise metrical language as to make it the vehicle of purely individual perceptions.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place, near Horsham, on the 4th of August 1792. As not seldom happens with old stocks, his family, one of great antiquity in the county of Sussex, had begun to develop types of eccentricity. His grandfather, Sir Bysshe Shelley, though a man of large fortune, exhibited a mania for hoarding money. He lived in a small cottage at Horsham, and was, says an acquaintance, "as indifferent to his personal appearance as to his style of living. He wore a round frock, and passed a portion of his time in the tap-room of the Swan Inn at Horsham, not drinking indeed with its frequenters, but arguing with them in politics."[1] He amassed a fortune of more than £100,000 beyond the family estate, real and personal, which he inherited. His son Timothy, who succeeded him in the baronetcy, was a more commonplace person, being a steady adherent of the Whig party in politics (he represented New Shoreham in Parliament), and attentive to all the duties of a country gentleman; but marked individuality soon showed itself in the character of the grandson. The latter, after being put under a tutor, Mr. Edwards of Warnham, when six years old, was removed at the age of ten to Sion House Academy, Isleworth, and seems to have there acquired the same reputation for unsociability as at Eton, whither he was sent in 1804. Dr. Goodall was Head-master of Eton at the time, and Shelley's tutor was George Bethell, a man of small acquirements, quite unfitted to understand the needs of his gifted pupil's peculiar disposition. Among

[1] Cited in Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. pp. 3, 4.

his schoolfellows he was known as "mad" Shelley. He did not join in their games, rebelled against fagging, and consequently became the victim of many a "Shelley bait." On the other hand, he read a good deal by himself, especially in the direction of romance and revolutionary political philosophy, while he found amusement in chemical experiments, such as the making of fire-balloons and the electrification of cats. In these he was assisted by Dr. Lind, a retired naval surgeon, whom Shelley has idealised in *Prince Athanase* under the name of Zonoras. Dr. Lind, it is said, prevented Mr. Timothy Shelley from sending Percy, when recovering from a fever, to a private mad-house. The boy's scientific studies were not very systematic: he was much more interested in the development of the visions of Alchemy—such as the discovery of the elixir of life and similar dreams of "magic"—than in the analysis of the laws of nature; and, when he left Eton for Oxford in 1810, was the disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus rather than of Sir Humphry Davy.

Dreams as to material possibilities soon took the shape of romantic fiction. Even while at Eton he and his cousin Medwin collaborated on a romance called *Nightmare* and a poem on the subject of the Wandering Jew. His wild and glowing imagination, unchecked by judgment or any sense of external reality and proportion, fed greedily on the drugs of German supernaturalism, the fumes of which were then intoxicating the fancy of the English youth; at the same time he absorbed a smattering of French philosophy through the medium of Godwin's *Political Justice*. These various elements, acting on an intelligence partly creative and partly analytic, found expression in a novel called *Zastrozzi*, which it is said was actually purchased in 1810 by a publisher called Robinson for forty pounds. This story is utterly incoherent in action and invertebrate in structure; but in it the curious may examine the first efforts of a powerful imagination, taught by Matthew Lewis to conceive and by William Godwin to speculate. No promise indeed is given, in the lumbering verse intermingled with the narrative, of the fluent and

spiritual music which overflows in *Prometheus Unbound*; but in the other essential features of action, character, and sentiment may be discovered the embryo of *The Revolt of Islam.*

On April 10, 1810, Shelley matriculated at University College, Oxford: he began his residence there in the Michaelmas term of the same year. Holding aloof from the ordinary undergraduate society of the college, he formed a close friendship with Hogg, his future biographer, a man clear-sighted, somewhat cynical, and in everything the opposite of himself. He read voraciously, following his own impulse, and without any reference to mental discipline, and in his second term embodied his philosophic opinions in a leaflet called *The Necessity of Atheism.* A copy of this production he told the booksellers he had sent "to every bishop on the bench, to the Vice-Chancellor, to each of the heads of houses; and accompanying each copy was a pretty letter in his own handwriting, with the signature of 'Jeremiah Stukeley,' the latest Avatar of Percy Bysshe Shelley, an incarnation assumed for this special occasion."[1] As happened to him all through his life, he seems to have been incapable of foreseeing the consequence of his action in the constituted order of things. Summoned before the authorities of his college, and asked whether he was the author of the leaflet, he refused to answer; whereupon he was presented with a formal order of expulsion.

"I have been with Shelley in many trying situations of his after-life," says Hogg, "but I never saw him so deeply shocked and so cruelly agitated as on this occasion. . . . He sat on the sofa, repeating with convulsive vehemence the words 'Expelled! expelled!' his head shaking with emotion, and his whole frame quivering."[2]

Hogg, who chivalrously wrote to the Master and Fellows requesting them to reconsider their sentence against his friend, was also called before them, and having, like Shelley, refused to answer the questions put to him,

[1] Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. i. pp. 118-19.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 120.

was subjected to the same penalty. The sentence was executed against both on the 25th March 1811. No doubt the college authorities would have acted both more kindly and more wisely if, in dealing with two inexperienced undergraduates, they had proceeded to enforce discipline more gently and deliberately; but in the Draconic methods of the time this was hardly to be expected; and nothing could have been more unreasonable than for Shelley, in view of the nature of his offence, when answering the questions put to him, to accuse his judges of "tyranny and injustice" and "vulgar violence."

On hearing of this expulsion from Oxford, Timothy Shelley wrote to his son requiring him to make his submission to his college, and to sever his connection with Hogg, whom the father regarded as the corrupter of his principles. Both conditions were refused, and for some time Shelley, being left, through his disobedience to his father, without resources, was obliged to subsist on such help as was given him by his mother and sisters or Hogg, and on loans advanced to him by booksellers. An arrangement with his father was at last made, through the friendly intervention of the Duke of Norfolk and Shelley's uncle, Captain Pinfold, by which he was to receive £200 a year without conditions. It was as certain as anything human could be that a young man of Shelley's disposition, in this state of comparative pecuniary independence, would now involve himself in some complication of love. He had already been enamoured of his cousin, Harriet Grove, who is said to have had a hand in the romance of *Zastrozzi*, and a half-engagement to her had been broken off on account of his opinions. He next formed an enthusiastic Platonic friendship with Elizabeth Hitchener, a school-mistress, ten years older than himself, with whom he carried on a voluminous correspondence about virtue, reason, sentiment, and all other matters touched on in the Godwinian philosophy. This odd relationship might have ended in more serious complications, but in the midst of it an appeal was made to Shelley which resulted in his marriage with Harriet Westbrook.

Shelley's first wife was the younger daughter of a retired tavern-keeper. As a schoolfellow of his sisters at Mrs. Fenning's school at Clapham, she had made his acquaintance after his expulsion from Oxford, and had received from him a present of his novel, *St. Irvyne.* Though she was only sixteen years old, he had endeavoured to inoculate her, as he did everybody he met, with the principles which he held to be the true basis of society. Having her head turned with these high-flown notions, Harriet proceeded to put them into practice. She found occasion for revolt in a petty matter of girl-school discipline, and protested against returning to Clapham: when her friends naturally declined to let her have her way, she wrote despairingly to Shelley, who was then paying a visit to a cousin at Cwm Elan in Radnorshire, representing the despotism to which she was a victim, and throwing herself on his protection. Shelley hesitated scarcely a moment as to the line of action he should adopt. He was not deeply in love; but with the enthusiastic chivalry, which is so attractive a feature in his character, he made up his mind that it was his duty to answer the appeal of a persecuted girl who had bestowed her affection on him, and to whom Hogg represented that he ought to bind himself by the legal ceremony of marriage. Accordingly he made preparations for carrying her off from London; and on the 28th of August 1811 was united to her, according to the forms of the Scotch Law, at Edinburgh, under the name and description of Percy Bysshe Shelley, farmer, Sussex.

Harriet appears to have been a girl of amiable and pleasing manners, with quickness enough to take a superficial interest in Shelley's revolutionary opinions, but without any of the intellectual enthusiasm required to enlist her sympathy in the constant changes of his imaginative moods. This want had still to be supplied by correspondence or intercourse with Miss Hitchener, and by the society of his friend Hogg. Shelley had written to the former, with some apprehension, to inform her of his marriage with Harriet Westbrook, and was greatly relieved

to find that she received the news with generous sympathy. "Thou art a sister of my soul,"—he wrote to her, after receiving her letter, in anticipation of the image he afterwards applied in *Epipsychidion* to Emilia Viviani:—"*he*" (no doubt Hogg) "is its brother." In this latter belief he soon received a rude shock. After residing in Edinburgh for about five weeks after his marriage, he was seized with a longing to join Hogg in York. Having taken lodgings there, and finding that, being hard-pressed for money, he would have to go into Sussex to make, if possible, some arrangement with his father, he started for the South, leaving his wife in his friend's charge. On his return from an unsuccessful expedition he learned that Hogg had, in his absence, made advances to Harriet, who had repelled them with indignation. It became necessary therefore to break off all intercourse with the unfaithful friend, and the Shelleys, leaving York secretly, took up their abode in Keswick. There they stayed from November 1811 till February 1812, embarrassed for some time by their financial difficulties, from which they were extricated by the consent of Mr. Westbrook to allow Harriet £200 a year, and Mr. Timothy Shelley's agreement to pay the same amount to his son. At Keswick Shelley made the acquaintance of Southey, who treated him with hospitality, and whose society he enjoyed, till he came to the conclusion that Southey was a hireling, working in the service of a tyrannical Government.

From Keswick Shelley and his wife proceeded to Ireland in the hope of bringing about a social revolution in that island. The Irish people were then being stirred by the first movements in behalf of Catholic Emancipation. Shelley, on the other hand, dreamed of a state of things calculated "to shake Catholicism on its basis, and to induce Quakerish and Socinian principles of politics"; principles which he had embodied in an "Address to the Irish People," written in anticipation of his crusade before he left Keswick. As both parties, however, were opposed to the existing political order, the strange allies met on the same platform in a meeting of Irish patriots

at the Fishamble Street Theatre in Dublin, where Shelley made a speech in which his hatred of Catholicism was sufficiently disguised by his denunciation of English tyranny to win the applause of his audience. His next design was to form an Association of Philanthropists for the regeneration of Ireland, the methods of this being explained in a second pamphlet, which he sent to the printers for publication; but his campaign was suddenly cut short by the intervention of William Godwin, with whom he had entered into correspondence, and whom he was prepared to obey as his spiritual father. Godwin represented to his disciple that he was too young to instruct the world, and that such an Association as he contemplated would probably only lead to the bloodshed which had accompanied the French Revolution. Shelley, though he questioned the soundness of the reasoning, submitted to the authority of his political director.

"Fear no more," he wrote to him, "for any violence or hurtful measures in which I may be instrumental in Dublin. My mind is now by no means settled on the subject of associations; they appear to me in one point of view useful, in another deleterious. I acquiesce in your decisions. I am neither haughty, reserved, nor unpersuadable. I hope that time will show your pupil to be more worthy of your regard than you have hitherto found him; at all events that he will never be otherwise than sincere and true to you."[1]

The pamphlet was accordingly withdrawn from circulation, and the Shelleys, leaving Dublin, at the beginning of April proceeded to Wales, where for some time they occupied a house at Nantgwillt, in the neighbourhood of Cwm Elan. This they left in June, and took up their abode at Lynmouth on the north coast of Devonshire. All this time Shelley had been pouring out his soul in letters to his Egeria, Miss Hitchener. She was "the Trinity of his Essence";[2] "the Star of Peace," to which the growing spirit of Republicanism in South America

[1] Dowden's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. i. p. 264.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 254.

was to look for hope and guidance.[1] Reports as to the scandalous character of their friendship had spread in Sussex. On hearing of them Shelley's indignation rose to boiling heat.

"You are," he wrote to her from Nantgwillt, "to my fancy as a thunder-riven pinnacle of rock, firm amid the rushing tempest and the boiling surge. Ay, stand firm for ever, and when our ship anchors close to thee, the crew will cover thee with flowers!"[2]

By Shelley and herself Miss Hitchener's Christian name, Elizabeth, was altered to Portia, though, as the more prosaic Harriet could not reconcile herself to the change, she was allowed, in consideration of her human weakness, to address her friend as plain "Bessie." Mr. Hitchener had forbidden his daughter to continue her relations with Shelley; but of course the purposed "tyranny" proved futile, and Portia joined the party at Lynmouth, where she helped Shelley to embark copies of a new "Declaration of Rights," sealed up in bottles or boxes, in the hope of their being picked up by vessels at sea. This characteristic method of propagating Revolutionary principles passed without notice, but when Shelley's servant took to posting on land the "Declaration of Rights," in the shape of bills, public attention was aroused, and the poet was placed under observation. To escape from espionage Shelley, his wife, and Miss Hitchener, at the end of August, left Lynmouth, and pitched their wandering tents for a time in Tremadoc, a small town on the coast of Carnarvonshire. By this migration they missed a visit from Godwin, with whom Shelley had continued to correspond, and who, having resolved to pay a visit to his disciple in his cottage at Lynmouth, arrived there about three weeks after the others had flitted from it.

At Tremadoc Shelley's imagination was excited by the sight of an embankment which, though nearly completed, was left unfinished for lack of funds; and

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 255. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 276.

within a month of his arrival, he was on his way to London to collect subscriptions for bringing the work to a successful issue. In London he met for the first time his chief "guide, philosopher, and friend." Godwin's establishment was strangely mixed. It was a bookseller's shop, presided over by the philosopher himself and his second wife, who was the most active partner in the business. By her first husband she had two children, one of whom, Jane Clairmont, lived with her in Skinner Street. Besides, the house found room for Fanny—daughter by Gilbert Imlay of Godwin's first wife—his own daughter, Mary, whose mother, Mary Woolstonecraft, had died in giving her birth, and William his son by his then wife, a boy of nine years old. The second Mrs. Godwin seems to have been of a character far from attractive. Charles Lamb describes her at the time of her marriage with the philosopher as "a very disgusting woman, who wears green spectacles";[1] she was certainly successful in embroiling the elements of her heterogeneous family.

Brought into personal connection with this society, Shelley, as might have been confidently anticipated by any one acquainted with the world and human character, rid himself rapidly of certain illusions, but rushed with equal vehemence into opposite imaginative extremes. The first victim of the new circumstances was the unfortunate Miss Hitchener. A few weeks' close intercourse with the poor woman had served to divest her of the glamour with which distance had surrounded her; Harriet was jealous of her; and her sins were increased by her failure to appreciate the philosophical perfections of Godwin. The "sister" of Shelley's "soul," "the Trinity of his Essence," the "rock that was to be crowned with flowers by the mariners anchoring at its side," was now discovered to be a "brown demon." "She is a woman," he wrote to a friend, "of desperate views and dreadful passions, but of cool and undeviating revenge."[2] And again: "My astonishment at my fatuity, inconsistency,

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 305.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 313.

and bad taste, was never so great as after living for four months with her as an inmate. What would Hell be were such a woman in Heaven?"[1] Miss Hitchener had to be and was dismissed, with the promise of an annuity; which, whether paid or not, was at least a sign of Shelley's good intentions towards one whom he felt that he had most unjustifiably injured.

After a stay in London of about two months Shelley, with his wife and her sister, Eliza Westbrook, suddenly returned to Tremadoc. It does not appear that he thought much more about his passing impulse to collect money for the embankment; but his imagination was excited while in Wales by the execution of fourteen "Luddites" for frame-breaking, and still more by the imprisonment of the brothers Hunt for their libel in *The Examiner* on the Prince Regent. To Leigh Hunt he at once sent a sum which he happened to have by him, together with an offer which the other calls "princely," and which, if it had been accepted, Shelley would of course have found himself unable to make good. These political incidents stimulated him to the completion of his poem, *Queen Mab*, which was finished about the middle of February 1813. Almost immediately afterwards his residence at Tremadoc was brought to a close by one of those visionary adventures in which he was constantly an actor. He believed himself to have been attacked twice at night by an assassin, of whom he himself was the only witness, and in the state of nervous excitement produced by the imaginary occurrence, he, his wife, and her sister Eliza, who lived with them, fled from Tanyrallt and took up their temporary abode at Dublin. Thence they moved in a few days to Killarney, and by the end of March were once more on the wing for London.

In London they kept moving about from one place to another—Cook's Hotel in Albemarle Street, Half-Moon Street, and some unnamed quarters in Pimlico—till June, when their daughter Ianthe was born, an event celebrated by Shelley in a sonnet resembling in feeling that composed

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 314.

by Coleridge on the birth of his first-born son.[1] The circle of their acquaintance was increased by several families attached to the Godwin coterie; and on the female portion of these Shelley now lavished the idealistic worship which, since the overthrow of Miss Hitchener, had been left without any external object. In the company of Mrs. Newton, Mrs. Boinville, and her daughter, Mrs. Turner, he studied Italian poetry, and presently made one of his numerous migrations to Bracknell, a village in Berkshire, where the little society could indulge without interruption their sympathies on the subjects of virtue, vegetarianism, and philanthropy. Financial difficulties were at present the only obstacles to ideal enjoyment. Mr. Timothy Shelley was still alienated from his son, and it was only by means of post-obits that the latter could raise money enough to provide for his own necessities and for the relief of the philosopher, Godwin, who even at this period seems to have discovered that a young man with Shelley's expectations might be useful in extricating him from his pecuniary embarrassments. A bond for £2000 procured £500 in ready money, and with this the Shelleys and their sister-in-law were enabled to make an expedition to the Lakes, and afterwards to Edinburgh, whence in December they returned to London.

Up to this time there had been no dissensions between husband and wife; but it is evident that, as in the case of Byron's marriage, there was complete incompatibility of temper. Harriet had grown out of the period of school-girl idealism, and her mind was now occupied rather with the difficulties raised by duns and post-obits than with schemes for elevating the human race. Shelley, on the contrary, remained unaffected by experience, and as soon as one vision faded, soared to another on the wings of imagination. In these he was sustained by other female sympathies, and it may readily be conceived that, as with

[1] See the sonnet cited in Mr. Dowden's *Life*, vol. i. p. 376:

> More dear art thou, O frail and fragile blossom;
> Dearest when most thy tender traits express
> The image of thy mother's loveliness,

and compare Coleridge's sonnet beginning, "Charles, my slow heart."

Coleridge, jealousy and irritation on the side of the wife, disenchantment on the part of the husband, produced a state of things which made home-life intolerable.

"I have been staying with Mrs. B[oinville] for the last month," writes Shelley to Hogg, from Bracknell, on 16th March 1814: "I have escaped in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. They have revived in my heart the expiring flame of life. I have felt myself translated to a paradise, which has nothing of mortality but its transitoriness; my heart sickens at the view of that necessity, which will quickly divide me from the delightful tranquillity of this happy home—for it has become my home. The trees, the bridge, the minutest objects, have already a place in my affections."[1]

The following extracts from Shelley's poetry mark clearly the gradual changes of mood in his affection for his wife. In the first year of his marriage, before the bloom had faded from his idealism, he wrote of her at Cwm Elan:

O thou! whose virtues latest known,
First in this heart yet claimst a throne;
Whose downy sceptre still shall share
The gentle sway with virtue there;
Thou fair in form, and pure in mind,
Whose ardent friendship rivets fast
The flowery band our fates that bind,
Which incorruptible shall last
When duty's hard and cold control
Has thawed around the burning soul;
The gloomiest retrospects, that bind
With crowns of thorn the bleeding mind;
The prospects of most doubtful hue,
That rise on Fancy's shuddering view;
Are gilt by the reviving ray
Which thou hast flung upon my day.[2]

And about the same time he addressed her in a poem written in blank verse, in which he says:

Nor when life's æstival sun
To deeper manhood shall have ripened me;
Nor when some years have added judgment's store

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 408.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 273-4.

To all thy woman sweetness, all the fire
Which throbs in thine enthusiast heart; not then
Shall holy friendship (for what other name
May love like ours assume?) not even then
Shall custom so corrupt, or the cold forms
Of this desolate world so harden us,
As when we think of the dear love that binds
Our souls in soft communion, while we know
Each other's thoughts and feelings, can we say
Unblushingly a heartless compliment,
Praise, hate, or love, with the unthinking world,
Or dare to cut the unrelaxing nerve
That knits our love to virtue?[1]

About a year later there is an evident change. He addresses a sonnet to his wife on her birthday.

EVENING: TO HARRIET

O thou bright Sun! beneath the dark blue line
Of western distance that sublime descendest,
And gleaming lovelier as thy beams decline
Thy million hues to every vapour lendest,
And over cobweb lawn, and grove, and stream,
Sheddest the liquid magic of thy light,
Till calm Earth, with the parting splendour bright,
Shows like the vision of a beauteous dream;
What gazer now with astronomic eye
Could coldly count the spots within thy sphere?
Such were thy lover, Harriet, could he fly
The thoughts of all that makes his passion dear,
And turning senseless from thy warm caress,
Pick flaws in our close-woven happiness.[2]

In the sonnet to his daughter, he says that her face is dearest to him when it most reminds him of her mother. But some verses written "To Harriet: May 1814," close with the following stanza:

O trust for once no erring guide!
Bid the remorseless feeling flee;
'Tis malice, 'tis revenge, 'tis pride,
'Tis anything but thee;
O deign a nobler pride to prove,
And pity if thou canst not love.[3]

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. pp. 287-8. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 413-14.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 414.

It is impossible to determine the exact facts relating to the separation between Shelley and his first wife. They were certainly living together in April 1814, at the time when Shelley wrote to Hogg the letter describing his feelings with regard to his "home" at Bracknell. But at that date the same letter shows that his imagination was occupied by some kind of idealising love, not certainly that of Harriet. He tells Hogg that he has written only "one stanza, which has no meaning":

> Thy dewy looks sink in my breast;
> Thy gentle words stir poison there;
> Thou hast disturbed the only rest
> That was the portion of despair!
> Subdued to Duty's hard control,
> I could have borne my wayward lot:
> The chains that bind this ruined soul
> Had cankered then, but crushed it not.[1]

This might refer either to Cornelia Turner—who (so Shelley told Hogg) "inherits all the divinity of her mother"—or to Mary Godwin, with whom he was certainly in love in June 1814. It seems doubtful whether Shelley had seen the latter (at least since she was a child) so early as April 1814: if he had, we might, with some confidence, trace Harriet's resolution to leave him, which she carried into effect during the late spring or summer of this year, to her knowledge of the relations existing between Godwin's daughter and her husband. We know at least that, in July 1814, Harriet and he were living apart; that Shelley was anxious to have a legal form of separation arranged, making an allowance to his wife. It appears, however, from Harriet Shelley's statement to Peacock, that, though she had an interview with her husband on the subject, no agreement was arrived at; and the next act in the drama was the elopement of Mary Godwin with Shelley from her father's house on the 28th of July 1814. They were accompanied by Mary Jane Clairmont, Mrs. Godwin's daughter by her first husband, and were in possession of just money enough to bring them back penniless to London, after a six weeks' tour on the Continent.

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 409.

The social complications produced by the practice of revolutionary philosophy were of the most extraordinary kind. In all directions sordid pecuniary embarrassments interfered with the aspirations of idealism. Finding himself on his return without money, Shelley actually applied to the wife whom he had deserted, and received from her £20. Godwin, on whose principles with regard to marriage Shelley had acted, conceived himself to have been deeply injured by his conduct, and refused to have any dealings with him except through an attorney, but was at the same time quite ready to receive money from him if he could do so without incurring any *apparent* obligation. Hunted by creditors from pillar to post, Shelley, through the winter of 1814, was forced to be perpetually shifting his lodgings, and obtained no relief from his difficulties while his grandfather was alive. The will of Sir Bysshe Shelley, who died in January 1815, was most complicated. By a settlement of the Shelley property, made in 1792, it was in the power of the poet and his father to bring the entail to an end at Sir Bysshe's death; but the latter, in the hope of keeping the estates together, left all the real and personal property, over which he had full control, disposed in such a way that, unless his grandson consented to prolong the entail of the old estates, none of the unsettled property would come into his possession. It was at first thought at least possible for Shelley and his father to cut the entail of the settlement of 1792; and an arrangement was made on this basis which enabled Sir Timothy to purchase his son's interest by an annuity of £1000 to be secured to the latter as a rent charge on some of the estates, and by a considerable sum of ready money advanced for the payment of the poet's debts. After a time it was discovered that this arrangement could not be carried out, since the intentions of the testator with regard to the unsettled estates would thereby be frustrated. Shelley, whose dealings with Godwin were throughout distinguished by generosity and gentlemanly feeling, as soon as the negotiations with his father were finished, paid the philosopher £1000, and at a later

date sent him a cheque to relieve him from fresh pressure by his creditors. This Godwin refused to receive in the form in which it was drawn. "I return your cheque," he wrote to Shelley, "because no consideration can induce me to utter a cheque drawn by you and containing my name." He would however receive the money if it was made "payable to Joseph Hume or James Martin"!

Relieved from his immediate financial embarrassments, Shelley now looked for a house in the country, and at last settled at Bishopsgate, near Windsor, where, in January 1816, a son was born to him by Mary Godwin. Here in the autumn of 1815 was written *Alastor*. After the Court of Chancery had decided that Sir Timothy Shelley could not purchase his son's reversion, the poet made up his mind to leave Bishopsgate and live on the Continent. In May 1816 he, Mary Godwin, and Jane Clairmont, resided for a time in a hotel near Geneva, where they made Byron's acquaintance, and continued to move about in his company on the shores of the lake till August, when Shelley, recalled by a letter from his solicitor, once more returned to England. The autumn and winter of the year spent by the poet, Mary Godwin, and Jane Clairmont at Bath, produced two tragedies in the Godwin and Shelley families—the suicide first of Fanny Imlay at Swansea, and afterwards of Harriet Shelley, who drowned herself in the Serpentine. On receiving intelligence of the latter event Shelley's first impulse was immediately to marry Mary Godwin, his next to obtain possession of his children by his former wife. The ceremony of marriage was completed on the 30th December 1816; but the children were withheld from him by Harriet's father and sister, who had taken charge of them after Shelley's separation from his wife. They now pleaded that the author of *Queen Mab* and the disciple of Godwin, who had put the theories of the latter into practice, was not a person qualified to be entrusted with the education of his children. A lawsuit in Chancery followed, which was closed on the 27th March 1818, by Lord Eldon's decision that the children could not be delivered over to

their father for education. While the suit was pending or proceeding, Shelley took a house in Great Marlow, and here, during the summer of 1817, he wrote *The Revolt of Islam* (or as it was at first called *Laon and Cythna*), which was published in December, at Shelley's expense, by Ollier, after the poet had been persuaded to alter certain passages which the printer feared might expose him to the risk of a prosecution.

Shelley's poetical career up to this point offers at once a singular parallel and a striking contrast to that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth, like Shelley, had at first shaped his imagination by a fervent enthusiasm for the principles of the French Revolution. But as experience showed him that the course of that Revolution was proceeding in a direction quite contrary to his own ideas, he gradually retired from all active participation in affairs, and worked out his own conceptions in solitary meditation among his native mountains. Shelley, on the other hand, never ceased from his efforts to translate his ideas into some form of external action. He rushed headlong against the historic institutions or conventions of society, and when he found his dreams of action demolished, set to work immediately to build new ideal fabrics. *The Revolt of Islam* was his poetical challenge to the practical procedure of the Court of Chancery. But money difficulties, ill-health, and dejection, caused him to turn his thoughts away from England, and on the 11th March 1818 he was on his way to Italy. Like Byron, he never returned to his native country, and, removed as he was from all possibility of active warfare with things at home, the incidents of his life abroad may be more briefly recorded, mainly in connection with his writings.

The first residence of any length by the Shelleys in Italy was at the Baths of Lucca, where they took a house from the beginning of June till the end of August. Shelley himself, however, driven by his perpetual restlessness, and stimulated by the desire of Jane Clairmont to see her infant daughter Allegra, who was under the care of her father, Byron, left his wife on the 11th of August

and travelled with Jane through Florence to Venice, where he had the interview with Byron that is poetically recorded in *Julian and Maddalo.* This poem was written in a villa at Este, which Byron had rented and now offered as a residence to the Shelleys. There too were composed the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," and the first act of *Prometheus Unbound.* Leaving Este at the end of October, the travellers passed through Ferrara and Bologna to Rome, and thence (as they intended to return) after about a week's visit to Naples, where they stayed for about three months, and where Shelley wrote his verses called "Stanzas written in Dejection." On the last day of February 1819 they were again on the way to Rome. On this occasion they remained there for three months, during which time the composition of *Prometheus Unbound* was completed in the Baths of Caracalla.

At Rome, on 7th June, William, Shelley's son by Mary Godwin, died, and was buried in the English cemetery. On the 10th of the month the party left Rome to take up their abode in Leghorn till the end of September, while the poet finished *The Cenci*, which he had begun at Rome in May. From Leghorn a move was made to Florence. Shelley's imagination was at this time greatly excited by the news of political events in England. The so-called "Massacre of Peterloo" caused him to believe in the coming of a period resembling affairs in France after 1789. "These," he wrote to Peacock on the 9th of September, "are, as it were, the distant thunders of the terrible storm which is approaching. The tyrants here, as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood. May their execrable lessons not be learnt with equal docility!"[1] Inspired by the event, he wrote his *Songs and Poems for the Men of England* and *The Masque of Anarchy*, the latter of which he endeavoured vainly to get Leigh Hunt to publish in *The Examiner.* He also wrote in prose a *Philosophical View of Reform*, and asked Hunt to find a publisher for the pamphlet; but, if the latter ever made an attempt to do so, his endeavours were

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 285.

in vain. In ridicule of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*, which had been published earlier in the year, Shelley wrote *Peter Bell the Third*. But while his mind was thus active, his bodily health suffered from the very severe winter in Florence, and in the middle of January 1820 the party suddenly resolved to leave that city for Pisa.

Pisa continued to be Shelley's headquarters almost up to the close of his life. He migrated for about six weeks to Leghorn, to be near his friends the Gisbornes, but at the beginning of August 1820 he moved thence to the Baths of St. Giuliano, a place about four miles distant from Pisa, where he stayed till late in October, when a flood compelled him to return to the city. His imagination through the year was much occupied with political events in Europe. In March the proclamation of the Spanish Constitution inspired him with the *Ode to Liberty*: the Revolution at Naples in July produced the *Ode to Naples*. The trial of Queen Caroline in England suggested to him the drama of *Œdipus Tyrannus; or Swellfoot the Tyrant*, which was published in London, but was almost immediately suppressed. At the same time the more purely literary and metaphysical side of his genius was also active. At Pisa he translated the Homeric *Hymn to Mercury*; while an excursion to Monte San Pellegrino stirred him to give expression to the mystical ideas of Nature suggested to him by the study of Spinoza; the poetical result being *The Witch of Atlas*.

At Pisa in the spring of 1821 Shelley fell platonically in love with Emilia Viviani, a girl of noble Italian birth, who, against her will, had been confined in a convent; and under the inspiration of this feeling he wrote *Epipsychidion*, a poem of which he himself said about a year later in a letter to Mr. Gisborne that he "could not look at it," recognising that its immediate motive was a delusion as complete as that which he had experienced in the case of Miss Hitchener. He continues:

> If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something

or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.[1]

About the same time Shelley wrote, in prose, as an answer to Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry*, his *Defence of Poetry*, which was not printed till after his death. In March of this year he had received intelligence of the death of Keats, which he attributed to the article on that poet in *The Quarterly Review*; and on 5th June he finished, at the Baths of St. Giuliano, his elegy, *Adonais*. In August he received a letter from Byron inviting him to Ravenna, where the latter was still living in the Guiccioli Palace. Shelley accepted the invitation, intending to make use of the opportunity to persuade Byron, if he could, to allow Jane Clairmont to see her daughter Allegra, whom her father had placed for education in a convent at Bagnacavallo in the Romagna. At Ravenna was completed the plan for starting *The Liberal*, a periodical to be owned and managed by Byron, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt, in which each of the partners should publish all their original compositions; and in view of this enterprise Shelley now invited Leigh Hunt to migrate from England to Italy. Stimulated by the war which had broken out between Turkey and her insurgent Greek subjects, he also wrote his *Hellas*, dedicating it to his friend Prince Mavrocordato. Without being strongly attracted to Byron by friendship, he was at this time much under the domination of his genius. He listened with the greatest admiration to the third, fourth, and fifth cantos of *Don Juan*, and did his best to carry out Byron's wish to settle himself at Pisa, where he took for him the Lanfranchi Palace on the Lung 'Arno.

From November 1821 till April 1822 the two poets were in close companionship at Pisa; but Shelley's feelings were more and more alienated from Byron on account of the behaviour of the latter, who prevented Jane Clairmont from seeing her daughter, while at the same time he insisted on keeping the child at the un-

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 381.

healthily situated convent of Bagnacavallo. Allegra died at this place early in April; and Shelley, while he concealed the fact from the mother, whom he had invited to stay with him at Pisa, felt the necessity of removing her with all speed from the neighbourhood of Byron. He accordingly impetuously pressed on negotiations which were already on foot for taking an unfurnished house at Spezzia. Thither he came with his family, Jane Clairmont, and his friends the Williams, on 1st May, and on the 2nd Jane was made acquainted with the loss of her child. On the 19th June Shelley heard from Leigh Hunt of the arrival of himself and his family at Genoa; on 1st July Hunt informed him of his departure for Leghorn and Pisa. At the same time news arrived of Byron's intended departure from Pisa, and Shelley at once set off for that city in order, if possible, to make provision for the Hunts under the altered circumstances. Sailing with Williams in a small schooner which the two friends had ordered for cruises on the coast, he arrived safely at Leghorn, and by 7th July had come to an arrangement with Byron as to Hunt's affairs. On the 8th he sailed with Williams for Spezzia, but they had not long left the harbour of Leghorn when they were caught in a violent storm, and for several days no tidings came of their vessel. On the 17th and 18th of July, however, two bodies were washed ashore, which proved to be those of Shelley and Williams. In the pockets of the former were found a volume of Sophocles and the last Poems of Keats, which Hunt had lent Shelley on parting from him at Pisa. The bodies having been lightly buried in the sands, in order to avoid legal difficulties arising out of the quarantine laws of the district, were burned on the 15th and 16th of August; and the casket containing Shelley's ashes was placed in a coffin and buried in the English cemetery at Rome on the 7th December 1822.

To separate criticism of the poetry of Shelley from a judgment of his temper and opinions is impossible.

"I have," says he in his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*,

"what a Scotch philosopher characteristically calls 'a passion for reforming the world.' . . . For my part I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to heaven with Paley and Malthus. But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love and admire and trust and hope and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life, which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Æschylus rather than Plato as my model."

In all this there seems to be much self-deception. Shelley no doubt regarded with abhorrence reasoned didactic verse of the type of *Religio Laici* or the *Essay on Man*. Nevertheless, *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and in fact every one of his more considerable compositions, are based upon an intellectual preconception of Nature and Society which had penetrated his imagination and coloured all his thought. That system was not the speculation of Plato, but the abstract philosophy of William Godwin. The essence of Godwin's creed was that, in the Europe of his day, whatever was was wrong, and that society required to be reconstituted on abstract principles.

"It is now twelve years," says he in the preface to his *Political Justice*, "that he (*i.e.* the author) became satisfied that monarchy was a species of government unavoidably corrupt. He owed this conviction to the political writings of Swift and to a perusal of the Latin historians. Nearly at the same time he derived great additional instruction from reading the most considerable French writers upon the nature of man in the following order, *Système de la Nature*, Rousseau, and Helvetius."

However Shelley in his later days may have modified his admiration of the French philosophers, there can be no doubt that their principles, through the medium of Godwin, were the inspiring source of his poetical genius. Acting on a spirit all made up of fire and imagination, untempered by the colder elements of reason and judgment, the idea of Man, Nature, and Society raised by these writers was for ever conflicting with the experience of the existing order of things, inspiring the poetical genius to create visionary worlds, and plunging the soaring spirit, when its aerial fabrics collapsed, into gulfs of despondency.

Shelley's flaming fancy could find no adequate vehicle for its energies in any of the forms of poetry established by the usage of the classical poets. He employed as his instruments of expression, the epic, the drama, and the elegy; but (with perhaps the single exception of *The Cenci*) in no single composition does he attempt the representation of action, passion, and character, or appeal to the emotions of pity and terror, on the lines followed by such poets as Æschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton. In all his work the lyrical mood predominates so enormously over the creative as to confuse the clear outlines of poetical structure; and, as in the case of Byron, the reader is always obliged to view the object put before his imagination through the coloured medium of the writer's personality.

The germs of Shelley's constant poetical practice may be traced in his earliest poem, *Queen Mab*. The subject of this composition is quite intelligible, viz. the revelation of the universe to a disembodied spirit. The machinery for the execution of the idea is of the simplest kind. Mab, the Fairy, is supposed to carry the spirit in her car to a point from which it can view the whole external order of Nature, of which the poem is made to give an account. In a structure marked by so little poetical invention it is obvious that the attention of the reader can be arrested only by the anti-religious character of the opinions expressed. The descriptions

are commonplace, and if it were not for the defiance of accepted beliefs, the following passage, setting forth the relations between kings and their subjects, and based on Godwin's anti-monarchical principles, would be noticeable simply for the crudity of its rhetorical platitudes:

> Is it strange
> That this poor wretch should pride him in his woe?
> Take pleasure in his abjectness, and hug
> The scorpion that consumes him? Is it strange
> That, placed on a conspicuous throne of thorns,
> Grasping an iron sceptre, and immured
> Within a splendid prison, whose stern bounds
> Shut him from all that's good or dear on earth,
> His soul asserts not its humanity?
> That man's mild nature rises not in war
> Against a king's employ? No—'tis not strange,
> He, like the vulgar, thinks, feels, acts, and lives,
> Just as his father did; the unconquered powers
> Of precedent and custom interpose
> Between a *king* and virtue. Stranger yet,
> To those who know not nature, nor deduce
> The future from the present, it may seem,
> That not one slave, who suffers from the crimes
> Of this unnatural being; not one wretch,
> Whose children famish, and whose nuptial bed
> Is earth's unpitying bosom, rears an arm
> To dash him from his throne!

*Alastor; or the Spirit of Solitude* ranks far higher than *Queen Mab* as a poetical composition; yet this too, though, in a sense, a narrative poem, is in its conception purely lyrical. Written at Bishopsgate, after a ten-days' rowing expedition on the Thames, it embodies a feeling of despondency—resulting from the disappointment of high-wrought idealism, of disenchantment after visionary dreams of love, and the overthrow of equally unsubstantial political schemes—in images inspired by memories of lonely landscapes in the Alps, and the pastoral scenery of an English river. The unresting idealism by which Shelley continued to be driven, as by the gad-fly of Io, down to the day of his death, is indicated in his choice of a motto from the *Confessions of St. Augustine*—"Nondum amabam, et amare amabam,

quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare"—and in the extremely beautiful opening address, where the poet himself appeals to the influences of Nature. All this gives to *Alastor* the unmistakable stamp of the writer's character; but when we look to the external structure, or form, of the poem through which he communicates his thought to his readers, we become conscious of artistic vagueness and debility. A poet (obviously a representation of the author, painted by himself), seeking ever in vain for the permanent object of his affections, sees in a dream her image, and on waking pursues it over the face of the earth. He embarks on the ocean in an unseaworthy boat, and is carried by the winds and waves into a cavern, through which his vessel follows the course of a subterranean river to the brink of a whirlpool, (seemingly a symbol of Death), where it is turned into a side stream, and follows the windings of a tributary rivulet, till the navigator comes to a "silent nook" in which

> He knew
> That death was on him;

the gradual fading of the external world from his dying eyes being strikingly described. The conclusion of the poem seems intended to show at once the impossibility of finding any stable object of love for the poetic imagination, and the loss suffered by the world when such an imagination vanishes from it.

> O for Medea's wondrous alchymy,
> Which, wheresoe'er it fell, made the earth gleam
> With bright flowers and the wintry boughs exhale
> From vernal blooms fresh fragrance! O that God,
> Profuse of poisons, would concede the chalice
> Which but one living man has drained, who now,
> Vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels
> No proud exemption in the blighting curse
> He bears, over the world wanders for ever,
> Lone as incarnate death! O that the dream
> Of dark magician in his visionèd cave,
> Raking the cinders of a crucible
> For life and power, even when his feeble hand
> Shakes in its last decay, were the true law

Of this so lovely world! But thou art fled
Like some frail exhalation, which the dawn
Robes in its golden beams,—ah, thou hast fled!
The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful,
The child of grace and genius. Heartless things
Are done and said i' the world, and many worms
And beasts and men live on, and mighty Earth
From sea and mountain, city and wilderness,
In vesper low or joyous orison,
Lifts still its solemn voice:—but thou art fled—
Thou canst no longer know or love the shapes
Of this phantasmal scene, who have to thee
Been purest ministers, who are, alas!
Now thou art not. Upon those pallid lips
So sweet even in their silence, on those eyes
That image sleep in death, upon that form
Yet safe from the worm's outrage, let no tear
Be shed—not even in thought. Nor when those hues
Are gone, and those divinest lineaments,
Worn by the senseless wind, shall live alone
In the frail pauses of this simple strain,
Let not high verse, mourning the memory
Of that which is no more, or painting's woe,
Or sculpture, speak in feeble imagery
Their own cold powers. Art and eloquence,
And all the shows of the world, are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their light to shade.
It is a woe "too deep for tears," when all
Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
Those who remain behind nor sobs nor groans,
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

"The poem," Shelley tells us in his Preface, "is not barren of instruction to actual men. The Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." It might be supposed then that this was the moral of the poem. Not so! The poet's pursuit of the unattainable ideal was at least preferable to the principles of those who busy themselves with the limited interests of life and action. Shelley seems to reckon as nothing the fact that, if the world in general were to pursue "the shapes of

this phantasmal scene," human society and sympathy could not exist. Nor does he take thought of the complementary fact that neither Dante nor Shakespeare, any more than the great poets of Greece and Rome, held this pursuit to be the true aim of poetry, all of them tacitly admitting that part of their art consisted in making concessions to the "common sense" of their audience. The world is not bound to acquaint itself with the postulates of any particular poet, and however unsympathetic was the criticism of *Alastor* by *The Monthly Review*, however blind to the beauties of the work in detail, it can scarcely be called unreasonable:

> We must candidly own that these poems are beyond our comprehension; and we did not obtain a clue to their sublime obscurity, till an address to Mr. Wordsworth explained in what school the author had formed his taste. . . . We entreat him for the sake of his reviewers, as well as of his other readers (if he has any), to subjoin to his next publication an *ordo*, a glossary and copious notes, illustrative of his allusions and explanatory of his meaning.[1]

It need hardly be said that Shelley did not act upon this advice. The characteristic features of *Alastor* stand out with even more prominence in *The Revolt of Islam*, because the epic character of that work is more pronounced. The poet gave, however, in his Preface an account of his intentions, which is full of interest. He begins with sounding loudly the note of Godwinism:

> The Poem is an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live. I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality; and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 59.

violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind.

It is evident from this, taken in connection with the general character of the poem, that in Shelley's mind the political history of England counted for nothing; and that for him the long struggle of this country with Napoleon, in defence of the principle of national independence in Europe, meant simply a war on behalf of monarchical despotism against the cause of "liberty and justice." Dazzled by the atmosphere of his idealism, he was unable to distinguish the shape and proportion of actual objects, and his illusions prevented him equally from understanding the qualities which the imagination of men, as generally constituted, requires in the conduct of a long narrative poem. His Preface shows how "the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem," are intended to be cast into an artistic whole in *The Revolt of Islam.*

The Poem (with the exception of the first canto, which is purely introductory) is narrative, not didactic. It is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of an individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind; its influence in refining and making pure the most daring and uncommon impulses of the imagination, the understanding, and the senses; its impatience at "all the oppressions which are done under the sun"; its tendency to awaken public hope and to enlighten and improve mankind; the rapid effects of the application of that tendency; the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission; the tranquillity of successful patriotism, and the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy; the treachery and barbarity of hired soldiers; vice not the object of punishment and hatred, but kindness and pity; the faithlessness of tyrants; the confederacy of the Rulers of the World, and the restoration of the expelled dynasty by foreign arms; the massacre and extermination of the Patriots, and the victory of established power; the consequences of legitimate despotism,—civil war, famine, plague, superstition, and an utter extinction of

the domestic affections; the judicial murder of the advocates of Liberty; the temporary triumph of oppression, that secure earnest of its final and inevitable fall; the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue.

Even granting that it was possible to treat of all these abstract ideas in narrative poetry, it is plain that the feat could only be accomplished through concrete images arranged in an intelligible order, and that (as Tasso had long before shown in his treatise on the requirements of epic poetry [1]) some concessions had to be made to the legitimate expectations of the reader. But for reasoning like this Shelley made no allowance:

"If," says he, "the lofty passions with which it has been my scope to distinguish this story shall not excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence, an interest profound and strong, such as belongs to no meaner desires—let not the failure be imputed to a natural unfitness for human sympathy in these sublime and animating themes. It is the business of the Poet to communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings, in the vivid presence of which *within his own mind* consists at once his inspiration and his reward."

Certainly it is. But it is also the epic or dramatic poet's business to produce this moral effect by satisfying what Aristotle calls the general idea of "the probable," with reference to action, passion, character, and description.

To expect that "virtuous enthusiasm for the doctrines of liberty and justice" could be kindled by a narrative poem of twelve cantos full of fictitious incidents conceived after the manner of those in *Zastrozzi*, showed a complete ignorance of the requirements of the reader's imagination, an element in art which no poet can afford to leave out of his account. The same sanguine improvidence is displayed by Shelley in his dramas, two of which—*Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*—have their foundation in Godwinian axioms, while the third, *The Cenci*, though cast in a more conventional mould, ignores so completely the temper of a theatrical audience, that it can hardly be said to conform to the canons of dramatic art.

[1] See vol. v. pp. 7-8.

*Prometheus Unbound* is professedly a continuation of the *Prometheus Vinctus* of Aeschylus; "but," says Shelley, "I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary." Nevertheless, it seems clear enough that the task which Aeschylus, as a dramatist, undertook was to put into a form suited for theatrical representation the incidents of an historic legend with which his audience were perfectly familiar. He would never have thought of altering the facts, as recorded, for his own philosophical purposes. No doubt the story suggested all kinds of interesting speculative problems; but the Aeschylean Prometheus is far from being the mere suffering philanthropist and rebel who appears in the drama of Shelley, and who is indeed the reflection of Shelley himself. The leading quality of the Greek Prometheus is his foresight, in which he is superior to Zeus; but, though he knows the future, he cannot control it: his desire is to square events to the law of Necessity: in the civil war of the Gods he would have sided with the Titans, but when he found that they hoped to prevail by blind force, he showed Zeus the way to make himself supreme by art and cunning. It is disgust at Zeus's ingratitude and brutal tyranny that makes Prometheus rebel against the dominion of which he foresees the end. In what way a dramatic situation would have been contrived out of his release by Hercules we find it difficult to imagine; but it is at least plain that, in the *Prometheus Vinctus*, the moral interest of the situation is brought out by a simple dramatic evolution of supposed facts.

In Shelley's poem, on the contrary, everything is ranged round the central idea of rebellion against constituted authority: the second act is without movement, but the idea of Promethean philanthropy, as viewed by

the English poet, is set forth in a long speech of Asia travestying Aeschylus's straightforward narrative of the Titan's dealings with the human race:[1] in the third act, Zeus is dethroned in mystic fashion by Demogorgon, while Prometheus is released by Hercules, who makes his appearance in the drama solely for the purpose of this deliverance: the fourth and last act is entirely lyrical. The action of the drama, in short, counts for nothing: ideas—that is to say, the poet's preconceived speculative ideas—are everything.

As *Prometheus Unbound* was suggested by the *Prometheus Vinctus* of Aeschylus, so the framework of *Hellas* is, in outline at least, to be traced in the *Persae*. Shelley's drama is, like that of Aeschylus, without direct action, and many of its leading features are copied immediately from the Greek. It opens with a chorus: there is an interpretation of dreams; a description of battles through the mouth of messengers, and a Ghost or Phantom. But no two plays can be more unlike each other in all the essentials of character. In the work of Aeschylus everything is directed to a definite end, with a view to arouse certain intelligible and readily anticipated emotions in the imagination of the audience. The religious moral is clearly indicated in the reflections of the Chorus: though the speakers are Persian, the feelings appealed to are those of the Greek spectators in the theatre; the actions reported by means of the *dramatis personae* are accurately historical; indeed the whole structure of the play is characterised by a certain *naïveté*, marking the transition from the epic to the dramatic style. In *Hellas*, on the contrary, all these clearly-cut dramatic outlines melt into an atmosphere of mysticism: Shelley's favourite figure of the Wandering Jew[2] is introduced into the machinery of the poem: the reported battles are as purely imaginary, and their supposed details as marvellous as those invented in the *Pharsalia*, by the ingenuity of

[1] Compare with the speech of Asia (Act ii. Sc. 4), Prometheus's speeches in lines 444-514 of *Prometheus Vinctus*.

[2] Already introduced into *Queen Mab*.

Lucan. Shelley's motives, in short, were, as he himself says, exclusively lyrical:

> The poem of *Hellas*, written at the suggestion of the events of the moment, is a mere improvise, and derives its interest (should it be found to possess any) solely from the intense sympathy which the Author feels with the cause he would celebrate.

In *The Cenci* the case is somewhat different. Unlike the other "dramas" of Shelley, this play was intended by its author for the stage: he thought that the part of Beatrice might suit Miss MacNeill, the popular tragic actress of the day. His conception of the design is described in the preface to the tragedy:

> The story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching of the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant, and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner, she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomising casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered consists.

Had Shelley possessed any knowledge of the working of human passions, he would have known that no audience—at least no English audience—would ever have tolerated on the stage the representation of "casuistry" like what he imagines. But assuming that such a spectacular exhibition were possible, *The Cenci* shows that he was not able to carry out his own idea with dramatic consistency. The interest of his drama is concentrated in the character of Beatrice. If parricide were in her case justifiable, it was dramatically necessary that she should boldly avow her act. Instead of doing so, she first hires assassins to murder her father, incites them when she finds them hesitating, and rewards them after the deed is done; but, as soon as she is confronted with the officers of justice, she disavows her instruments, and uses all the artifices of rhetoric to persuade her judges how improbable was the story that she could have "planned the crime alleged"! Although she knows that he knows that every word she utters is a lie, she makes in court such an impressive appeal to the vulgar murderer whom she has hired, that she induces him to withdraw his confession of the true facts, and he allows himself to be broken on the wheel in proof of her innocence!

The essence of ancient poetry lay in imitation; in other words, poetry was an ideal representation of life and action, viewed through the general spiritual atmosphere pervading society, and expressed metrically by means of certain forms determined by artistic experience. On this principle, the view of nature formed by the individual poet was no doubt constantly modified by external forces, but substantially it was identical—in so far as it was artistically correct—with that of his audience. Dante's idea of the Universe was not peculiar to himself, but was authorised by the prevailing Scholastic Philosophy; Shakespeare's view of life was the Christian religion, seen through the patriotic and monarchical enthusiasm of Elizabethan England; Milton's central conception in *Paradise Lost* was the Catholic faith, modified by the Republican and Puritan influences springing out of the Reformation.

Shelley shows, over and over again, in his prefaces that he understood this principle, and that he was aware of a common atmosphere acting upon himself and his contemporaries. He lived in an age of Revolution, and the French Revolution was bound to affect profoundly the form of English poetry. But to Shelley, Revolution meant such a complete overthrow of all established ideas, that he made no allowance in his art for the growth of nineteen centuries of Christian and feudal thought. With him the world began again in the philosophy of Godwin and the French materialistic philosophers; and if this fundamental idea of Nature was afterwards somewhat modified by the study of Plato and Spinoza, it left no room in his imagination for any conception of Society based on historic evolution.

It is evident, *prima facie*, that no known form of epic or drama could be employed as the vehicle for ideas so conceived. Whatever metrical mould was to be used as a means of communication between Shelley and his readers had, from the artistic point of view, to be solely lyrical. Even the lyrical form was unavailable, so far as the matter involved the representation of external objects in a clearly defined metrical structure. Compare, for example, Collins' *Ode to Liberty* with that of Shelley on the same subject. The former employs the Greek form of strophe, antistrophe, and epode; and his view of the progress of Constitutional Freedom, though not marked by profound thought, is clear, simple, and well proportioned. Shelley's subject was professedly the proclamation of the Constitution in Spain in 1820, an incident which has certainly not made any deep impression on the course of history, and in order to celebrate this, he expanded his thought into nineteen strophes of fifteen lines each. He describes the chaotic state of Nature and Society before the appearance of Liberty—showing how, in some stage of human life (unknown, it need hardly be said, to history), everything lay at the mercy of Anarchy, Tyranny, and Priesthood. Then Athens arose, and devised Art and Order: afterwards came Rome, under whose republican rule "saintly

Camillus lived and firm Atilius died." But under the despotism of the Roman Empire Christianity made its appearance, and, up to the time of the French Revolution, enslaved mankind. England yet slept; but she should awake at the call of Spain; and the period is prayed for when Christianity shall be no more:

> O that the free would stamp the impious name
> Of * * * * into the dust or write it there,
> So that this blot upon the page of fame
> Were as the serpent's path which the light air
> Erases, and the flat sands close behind!

And yet, when Liberty has destroyed all forms of established authority and external faith; when the spirit of Man is left, in a void Universe, free from all power superior to itself,—what does the poet find remaining but mere negation? The Ode ends in feelings of deep despondency, clothed in magnificent imagery:

> The spirit of that mighty singing
> To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn;
> Then as a wild swan, when sublimely winging
> Its path athwart the thunder-smoke of dawn,
> Sinks headlong through the aerial golden light
> On the heavy sounding plain,
> When the bolt has pierced its brain;
> As summer clouds dissolve unburthened of their rain;
> As a far taper fades with fading night,
> As a brief insect dies with dying day,
> My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
> Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
> Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
> As waves, which lately paved his watery way,
> Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.

In spite of its structural defects, Shelley's *Ode to Liberty* affords an admirable specimen of his poetical qualities, and suggests the reasons for the essential differences between his genius and that of the poets who wrote upon classical principles. Shelley is the most brilliant representative of the romantic school of poetry as described in the definition of Wordsworth:

> He (the poet) is a man speaking to men; a man it is true endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and

tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.[1]

No words can more fittingly portray the temper and poetical methods of the author of *Alastor*. With a spiritual gaze turned first inward, on his own passions and volitions, and then outward upon the Universe, he looked in vain for external objects answering to the forms generated by his dazzling imagination; and he was perpetually forced to allow the baselessness of his visions of Immortality. As he says in a striking sonnet:

> Ye hasten to the grave! What seek ye there,
> Ye restless thoughts and busy purposes
> Of the idle brain, which the world's livery wear?
> O thou quick Heart, which pantest to possess
> All that anticipation feigneth fair!
> Thou vainly curious Mind, which wouldest guess
> Whence thou didst come, and whither thou mayest go,
> And that which never yet was known wouldst know—
> Oh, whither hasten ye, that thus ye press
> With such swift feet life's green and pleasant path,
> Seeking alike from happiness and woe
> A refuge in the cavern of grey death?
> O heart, and mind, and thoughts! What thing do you
> Hope to inherit in the grave below?

In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* he seems for a moment to cherish a belief in some unchanging Spirit of Beauty; but the study of Spinoza rather led him to imagine an unseen Life of the Universe, eternal but ever changing; and for this conception he perpetually sought external forms of expression. No poet, ancient or modern, has equalled Shelley in the power of accumulating successions of sublime images in flowing verse: no poet has ever exhibited such inexhaustible resources in finding words metrically suited to the subtle and intricate

[1] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.

windings of spiritual thought. His poetry seems to be a reflection of his own idea of Nature as imaged in the lines of his *Adonais*:

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.

As far as it was possible for such a kaleidoscopic view of things to assume a formal shape the result is embodied in *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound*, poems in which the Fancy wanders vaguely through an ideal world, where images, resembling on a gigantic scale natural objects, —mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, and caverns—appear for a moment with outlines as clear as Alpine peaks in sunlight, and then dissolve, or vanish in seas of rising vapour. In the midst of this ideal landscape the voice of the poet cries unrestingly for the Infinite:

> I can give not what men call love,
> But wilt thou accept not
> The worship the heart lifts above
> And the Heavens reject not:
> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow?

Sometimes the human spirit seems to merge itself in the movement of the invisible forces of Nature, as in the beautiful *Ode to the West Wind*:

> If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
> If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
> A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
>
> The impulse of thy strength, only less free
> Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
> I were as in my boyhood, and could be
>
> The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
> As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
> Scarce seemed a vision, I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Once the unsatisfied imagination of the poet discovered an external object which seemed exactly to typify the nature of its own emotion, and grouped around it a multitude of images with an absolute perfection of art. I need hardly say that I refer to the divine lines *To a Skylark.* Generally speaking, Shelley seems to find the repose which art in poetry requires, rather in the images of Greek mythology than in any object of modern contemplation. In the beautiful little poem *Arethusa* the mythopoetic power of personifying the movements of Nature is exhibited in unrivalled perfection: there is an enchanting melody in the *Hymn of Pan*, written for an intended drama on the subject of Midas; and in the Translation of the Homeric *Hymn to Mercury* the ease and playfulness of the style breathe all the free spirit of Greek polytheism. But the Greek genius shrank from the contemplation of the Infinite; Greek art loved to clothe itself in clear and definite forms: all therefore that Shelley's poetry has in common with the Greek is the power of abstracting ideas from natural objects and embodying them in brilliant images. The Platonic philosophy is clearly discoverable as the source of the fluent melody in the following passage from *Epipsychidion*:

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate
Whose course has been so starless! O too late
Beloved! O too soon adored, by me!
For in the fields of Immortality
My spirit should at first have worshipped thine,
A divine presence in a place divine;
Or should have moved beside it on this earth,
A shadow of that substance, from its birth;
And not as now: I love thee; yes, I feel
That on the fountain of my heart a seal
Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright
For thee, since in those *tears* thou hast delight.

> We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,
> For one another though dissimilar;
> Such difference without discord as can make
> Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake,
> As trembling leaves in a continuous air?

But judgment and artistic good sense would have prevented any Greek poet, even in the days of the *Anthology*, from expressing himself in terms of gushing enthusiasm about an external object of which, within a year, Shelley could write as follows:

> The *Epipsychidion* I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace.[1]

These words may be taken as an epigrammatic summary of the character of almost all this poet's work. The most brilliant spiritual imagination that ever appeared in English poetry was for ever embracing "a cloud instead of a Juno"; and his most truly artistic, as well as his most pathetic, compositions are those embodying the feelings of despondency in which "poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace." Herein lies the difference between Shelley's idealism and that of two great poets with whom in many respects his genius seems to have much affinity, Dante and Spenser. To Dante he is constantly referring: he uses the *terza rima* more frequently than any other English poet; and in one of his latest compositions—left unfinished, rough, and obscure—he takes the general conception and even the phraseology of the Florentine poet as his model. The *Triumph of Life* is, like the *Divine Comedy*, a vision of humanity, interpreted by means of allegorical symbols; but whereas the character of the mediæval poem exhibits itself in dogmatic clearness, strength, and symmetry, the keynote of Shelley's thought is uncertainty and confusion. As Virgil explains to Dante the meaning of the various scenes in the *Inferno*, so Rousseau interprets for Shelley the significance of the visionary pageant that passes before his imagination; but while the system of

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 381.

rewards and punishments in the *Divine Comedy* is regulated by a Divine moral law, the conclusion in Shelley's poem seems to be that Life triumphs over everything by mere movement: love itself, with each individual thing, is crushed beneath her car, like that of Juggernath. According to Rousseau:

> In the battle life and they did wage,
> She remained conqueror. I was overcome
> By my own heart alone, which neither age
>
> Nor tears, nor infamy, nor now the tomb
> Could temper to its object. "Let them pass,"
> I cried; "the world and its mysterious doom
>
> Is not so much more glorious than it was,
> That I desire to worship those who drew
> New figures on its false and fragile glass
>
> As the old faded."—"Figures ever new
> Rise on the bubble, paint them as you may;
> We have but thrown, as those before us threw,
>
> Our shadows on it as it past away."

So again there is much of common kindred in the lofty, chivalrous, and purely intellectual aspirations of Spenser and Shelley: as in Shelley, so in Spenser, there was a spirit always seeking for some external object conformable to its own ideal, and always failing to discover it. Shelley would have sympathised deeply with the mood in which Spenser wrote the following stanza:

> So oft as I with state of present time
> The image of the antique world compare,
> When as man's age was in his freshest prime
> And the first blossome of faire virtue bare;
> Such odds I finde twixt those and these which are,
> As that, through long continuance of his course
> Me seemes the world is runne quite out of square
> From the first point of his appointed source,
> And being once amisse grows daily worse and worse.

But here again Spenser's ideal, unattainable in the actual condition of things, was at least readily intelligible from the point of view of life, action, and authority. To form the "noble courtier"; or, as he says himself, "to fashion

a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline," seemed no idle dream in an age which could still produce such a specimen of knighthood as Sir Philip Sidney: however remotely withdrawn into the heart of Fairyland, the figure of Gloriana was not an irrational object of worship to men still familiar with the principles of Feudal Monarchy. On the other hand, the idealism of Shelley had no basis beyond his own chivalrous and enthusiastic temper, which, Ixionlike, was always forming clouds into momentary shapes of human perfectibility round commonplace figures,—Elizabeth Hitchener, for example, and Emilia Viviani,—or into aerial visions of impossible societies, like the revolutionised Golden City, founded on the speculations of an intelligence sordidly worldly, like that of William Godwin. The enduring poetry of Shelley consists not in these evanescent fabrics, but in the lyric cries of pain, so typical of idealism in all ages, drawn from a generous and sensitive soul awaking from its illusions to the harsh realities of life. "Good, far more than evil impulses," he wrote to his second wife, "love far more than hatred, has been to me, except as you have been the object of it, the source of all sorts of mischief." And the feelings of the disenchanted spirit, expressed in poems like *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, *To a Skylark*, the *Ode to the West Wind*,—much more than the vast and vague conceptions of *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Hellas*—are the monuments which, as long as the English language is read, will continue to draw the affection and sympathy of men towards their amiable and most unfortunate author:

Some might lament that I were cold,
  As I when this sweet day is gone,
Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,
  Insults with this untimely moan;
They might lament—for I am one
  Whom men love not,—and yet regret,
Unlike this day, which, when the sun
  Shall in its stainless glory set
Will linger, though enjoyed, like joy in memory yet.

# CHAPTER X

## ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

### Poetry and Painting: John Keats

THE principle of poetic introspection, inaugurated and advocated by Wordsworth, after embodying itself first in the romantic self-representation of Byron, and then in the revolutionary idealism of Shelley, found finally a mode of expression, which, though at the time it attracted comparatively little notice, has probably produced more lasting results in determining the course of modern poetry than the practice of any of the three poets just mentioned. I allude to the approximation between the arts of poetry and painting, which gives its dominant character to the work of the author of *The Eve of St. Agnes.*

John Keats was born at the Swan and Hoop Inn, Finsbury Pavement, London, on the 29th or 31st of October 1795. His father, who was hostler to Mr. Jennings, keeper of the livery stable of the inn, married his master's daughter—a step which obtained for him in time the management of the business. This prospered, and in his eighth year John was sent to a school at Enfield, kept by the Rev. John Clarke, whose son Charles, then his father's assistant, took a great interest in his pupil's progress, and did much to encourage his literary talents.

"In the early part of his school life," he tells us, "John gave no extraordinary indications of intellectual character; it was in the last eighteen months or so that he became an omnivorous reader. . . . History, voyages, and travels, formed the bulk of the

school library, and these he soon exhausted, but the books that he read with most assiduity were Tooke's *Pantheon*, Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, which he seemed to *learn*, and Spence's *Polymetis*." [1]

Keats was removed from school at the age of fifteen, and (his father being dead and his mother having married again) was apprenticed to Mr. Hammond, a surgeon at Edmonton. With him he remained till 1814, when he came to London to study medicine. He had already had his taste for poetry confirmed by Charles Clarke, who in 1813 delighted his imagination by reading to him Spenser's *Epithalamion*. His inclination for the Elizabethan poets was strengthened by Leigh Hunt, under whose influence he came in 1816, rather more than a year after the latter had been released from the imprisonment to which he had been subjected in consequence of his libel on the Prince Regent. Keats and his friend Clarke were both admirers of Hunt's political principles; and Clarke, who was personally acquainted with the Editor of *The Examiner*, brought his old pupil's MSS. under his notice. In Hunt's paper were published, in 1816 and the early months of 1817, Keats' *Sonnet to Solitude*, that beginning *After dark Vapours*, the *Sonnet written at the end of the "Flowre and the Lefe,"* and that *To Haydon on the Elgin Marbles*. Hunt wrote an article on Reynolds, Shelley, and Keats in *The Examiner* of December 1816, and in March 1817 Keats' volume of poems appeared, with a sonnet of dedication to Hunt. In April 1817 Keats began *Endymion*, which was finished in the following November. This poem was published by Taylor and Hessey in April 1818, and was savagely reviewed in *Blackwood's Magazine* for August, and in *The Quarterly Review* for September of that year.

Though it appears that Keats was seriously annoyed by these attacks, he was certainly not affected by them in the way that Shelley supposes in *Adonais*, and Byron in *Don Juan*. Most of his best work was done between the autumn of 1818 and the winter of 1819-20, during

[1] Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers*, pp. 122-4.

which period he wrote *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Lamia*, the Odes to *Indolence*, *Nightingale*, *Psyche*, *Melancholy*, *Autumn*, on a *Grecian Urn*, and several Sonnets. In August 1818 he had made the acquaintance of Fanny Brawne, and gradually conceived a passion for her, which absorbed his imagination, and, mixing itself with the disease that was consuming him, at last mortified his powers of composition. She seems to have been a vain and vulgar person, with some personal attractions, round which Keats' idealising fancy played like a moth about a candle, giving utterance to the agony of his emotions in such poems as the lines *To Fanny* and those beginning:

> What can I do to drive away
> Remembrance from my eyes?

or the Sonnets opening, "The day is gone," and "I cry your mercy." In February 1820 severe haemorrhage warned him of his approaching end. Recovering from this attack, he left Hampstead, where he had written some of his most characteristic poems, moving at first to Kentish Town, to be near Leigh Hunt, and afterwards—having suffered from a bad relapse—to the house of that poet in Mortimer Street. While he resided there, the volume containing the poems written in 1819 was published, and was favourably noticed by Hunt in *The Indicator* and by Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*.[1] Keats declined an invitation from Shelley to winter with him in Italy, but feeling the necessity of escaping from the severe climate of England, he sailed with his friend Severn in September for Naples, and on the voyage, having landed at Lulworth Cove, wrote his last sonnet beginning, "Bright Star!" Reaching Naples towards the end of October, he passed thence to Rome in the middle of November, and within a month of his arrival in the city was again attacked by haemorrhage. In this state he lingered till the 23rd February 1821, when he died, and was buried in the English cemetery on the 27th of the same month.

The poetry of Keats exhibits the progressive efforts

[1] *Edinburgh Review* for August 1820.

of a man of powerful genius to create for his imagination an ideal atmosphere, unaffected by the social influences of his age, by conceiving of external Nature in the mythological spirit of pagan times, and by giving expression, in metrical words, to the ideas so conceived, in a manner resembling the art of those who imitate external objects by means of form and colour. His dominant qualities as a poet are an emotional sensibility, swayed by a voluptuous perception of beauty in natural things, and a brilliant fancy which enabled him readily to abstract ideal forms from the objects presented to his eye. Historically, the interest of his career lies in three consecutive stages, the first of which shows him gradually passing out of the mood of philosophical Nature-worship and the introspective habits of Wordsworth into the mythological methods proper to Greek polytheism; the second throws light upon the manner in which the Classical Renaissance, on its purely literary side, is related to this movement of Romantic art; while the third is the period of matured artistic accomplishment, when Keats had discovered by experience the limits within which his genius could move with freedom.

1. I have endeavoured to trace the intellectual process which drew Wordsworth away from sharing in the political activities of his age into a life of solitary contemplation among his native mountains. There is an evident affinity between the philosophical scheme of Nature-worship which he there developed and the fundamental ideas of Greek religion. In *The Excursion* he uses the polytheistic mythology of the Greeks as an argument to prove the existence of an unseen spirit in Nature.[1] He even regrets in one of his sonnets his want of the mythopoetic faculty:

> Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan, suckled in a creed out-worn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

[1] *The Excursion*, Book iv., "The lively Grecian, etc."

But his delight in natural objects was with him only a stepping-stone towards that philosophical view of Nature which he sought finally to erect into a positive religious creed. As he says, in *The Prelude*:

> My delights
> (Such as they were) were sought insatiably,
> Vivid the transport, vivid though not profound;
> I roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
> Still craving combinations of new forms,
> New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,
> Proud of her own endowments, and rejoiced
> To lay the inner faculties asleep.[1]

Keats, though educated in the Wordsworthian school of Nature-worship, desired to halt at the stage which the Lake poet pronounced unsatisfactory. In his first volume, published in 1817, the opening poem is an attempt to express the perceptions of beauty aroused in his imagination by a confused crowd of rural objects which he declares to be the true source of poetical inspiration:

> For what has made the sage or poet write
> But the fair paradise of Nature's light?
> In the calm grandeur of a sober line
> We see the waving of a mountain pine;
> And when a tale is beautifully staid,
> We feel the safety of a hawthorn glade:
> When it is moving on luxurious wings
> The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings:
> Fair dewy roses brush against our faces
> And flowering laurels spring from diamond vases;
> O'er head we see the jasmin and sweet briar,
> And bloomy grapes laughing from green attire;
> While at our feet the voice of crystal bubbles
> Charms us at once away from all our troubles,
> So that we feel up-lifted from the world
> Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd.

Keats, like Coleridge, shrank from that austere communion with Nature by which Wordsworth vindicated the right of poetry to withdraw from participation in the active movement of life. But that which to Coleridge seemed a point of perfection unattainable by his own moral being[2] was to Keats an odious misdirection of art.

[1] *Prelude*, Book xii.

[2] See p. 188.

"We hate poetry," he writes to a friend, "that has a palpable design upon us. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul."[1] Repulsion from Wordsworth's ethical doctrines was, with him, mainly a matter of temperament: he was tortured by a disease inherent in his constitution. "O for a life," he exclaims, "of sensations rather than of thoughts!"[2] and though this aspiration was identified in his mind with the intellectual axiom that "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty, must be Truth,"[3] yet it cannot be separated from his practical illustration of "happiness" as described in the following passage:

This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless. I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*—my passions are all asleep, from my having slumbered till nearly eleven, and wakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation, about three degrees on this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lilies, I should call it languor, but as I am I must call it laziness. In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement, and pain no unbearable power. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek Vase—a man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement. *This is the only happiness, and is a rare instance of the advantage of the body overpowering the Mind.*[4]

Such materialism renders perfectly intelligible Keats' revolt alike from the severity of Wordsworth's poetical philosophy, and from the active political ideals of classical poetry, epic or dramatic. What would Homer's Sarpedon, for example, have said to the opinions expressed by the languid and sleepy hero of *Endymion*?

> Now if this earthly love has power to make
> Men's being mortal, immortal; to shake
> Ambition from their memories, and brim
> Their measure of content: what merest whim
> Seems all this poor endeavour after fame
> To one who keeps within his steadfast aim

[1] *Letters of John Keats*, p. 68. [2] *Ibid.* p. 42. [3] *Ibid.* p. 41.
[4] Keats' *Works* (Buxton Forman), vol. ii. p. 329.

A love immortal, an immortal too.
Look not so wildered ; for these things are true,
And never can be born of atomies
That buzz about our slumbers like brain flies,
Leaving us fancy-sick.[1]

Wordsworth, though, in his first sympathy with the French Revolution, he had detached himself from the historic life of his country, sought to replenish the springs of action with the conscious reasoning of philosophy ; Keats boldly proclaims the superiority of the ideal life of poetic imagination to that of political action :

Hence pageant history ! hence gilded cheat !
Swart planet in the universe of deeds !
Wide sea that one continuous murmur breeds
Along the pebbled shore of memory !
Many old rotten-timber'd boats there be
Upon thy vaporous bosom magnified
To goodly vessels ; many a sail of pride
And golden-keel'd, is left unlaunch'd and dry.
And wherefore this ? What care though owl did fly
About the great Athenian admiral's mast ?
What care though striding Alexander past
The Indus with his Macedonian numbers ?
Though old Ulysses tortur'd from his slumbers
The glutted Cyclops, what care ? Juliet leaning
Amid her window-flowers,—sighing—weaning
Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow,
Doth more avail than these : the silver flow
Of Hero's tears, the swoon of Imogen,
Fair Pastorella in the bandits' den,
Are things to brood on with more ardency
Than the death-day of empires.[2]

In the poem entitled *Sleep and Poetry*, that closes the volume published in 1817, he expresses the hope of being one day able to bring ideal life and unity into the crowd of incoherent images by which his mind is haunted :

But off, Despondence ! miserable bane !
They should not know thee, who athirst to gain
A noble end are thirsty every hour.
What though I am not wealthy in the dower

[1] *Endymion*, Book i. 844-54. Compare with this Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus in *Iliad* xii. 310-28.

[2] *Endymion*, Book ii. 14-34.

Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts
Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts
Out the dark mysteries of human souls
To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
A vast idea before me, and I glean
Therefrom my liberty: thence too I've seen
The end and aim of Poesy.

2. The "idea," thus dimly conceived, embodied itself in an attempt to employ mythology in poetry, as an instrument for communicating to the world Keats' own impressions of external Nature. Of Greek mythology he knew little through the direct medium of Classical poetry. His education had been brief and perfunctory, and his knowledge of the ancient legends was for the most part derived from Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* or Sandys' translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. But his appetite for poetry, which had been early developed, was fed mainly upon the works of the Elizabethan writers, who had freely availed themselves of the materials of mythology; and his first desire was to revive the Elizabethan manner in opposition to the literary fashions of his own age. "Is there," he asks,

Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood that the high
Imagination cannot freely fly
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?
From the clear space of ether to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning
Of Jove's large eye-brow to the tender greening
Of April meadows? Here her altar shone,
E'en in this isle; and who could paragon
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
Of harmony, to where it ay will poise
Its mighty sphere of convoluting sound
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,
Eternally around a dizzy void?
Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloy'd
With honours, nor had any other care
Than to sing out and smooth their wavy hair.[1]

[1] *Sleep and Poetry.*

From this point he proceeds to a trenchant attack upon the conventional canons of the prevailing taste. The freshness and youthful enthusiasm with which Keats proclaims his poetical ambitions are highly attractive; but the foregoing lines reveal clearly how erroneous were his conceptions of the relations existing between society at the beginning of the nineteenth century and society in the reign of Elizabeth.

Keats took no account of the active nationalising principle which marked the whole course of the Renaissance in its operations on English Literature. In his passionate desire for a larger liberty of imagination, he fixed his gaze exclusively on certain literary features in the works of the Elizabethan poets whom he most enthusiastically studied. He loved their picturesqueness, their ardour, their free use of mythology, the boldness with which they coined new words, even the negligence with which they handled metre. But he did not reflect on the social conditions which made the exercise of these qualities a natural, even an inevitable, feature at that stage in the development of English poetry. Liberty of imagination, no doubt, the Elizabethans enjoyed in a far greater measure than their successors. National consciousness was in its infancy: the lines between the old and the new forms of religion were far from being sharply drawn: the vocabulary, the rhythms, indeed the whole rhetoric of the language, were still in a fluid state: hence the great English poets at the close of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century availed themselves of the Classical materials of their art, poured into the country by the Renaissance, in a spirit of exuberant freedom. Compared with the Greeks, however, their view of Nature was complicated both by the inherent conflict between Christian and Pagan ideas, and by the traditions of all the imaginative literature accumulated in the world since the extinction of the poetic age of Greece. Pastoralism was to Spenser, Drayton, Browne, and the other poets who furnished Keats with models, something quite different from what it was to Theocritus; the Elizabethans

contemplated Nature through the atmosphere, altogether literary, created for them by the Italian Renaissance.

Had Keats examined the question historically, even on its purely literary side, he would have observed a curious change in the handling of mythology by successive generations of English poets. To Spenser, for example, mythology was but a single element in the vast mass of materials utilised for the composition of *The Faery Queene*; an element which might be freely associated, however incongruously, with chivalrous and theological ideas, without any attempt to reconcile such contrarieties in a scheme of logical harmony.[1] In *Paradise Lost*, on the other hand, though Milton makes free use of mythological materials, he never loses sight of their relation to Christian ideas, and always employs mythological imagery exclusively for the purposes of ornament or illustration. The mythological fashion, introduced by the Renaissance, gradually faded out of English poetry under the pressure —irresistibly exerted on the imagination—of Calvinist theology, civil order, and experimental science; and when Keats sought to revive mythology, the method for the imaginative interpretation of Nature, which was beginning to establish a footing in English society, was the philosophical analysis of Wordsworth. It was unfortunate for Keats that, just at the period when his genius required to be strengthened by discipline, he should have come under the influence of one so certain to confirm him in his fallacious view of the progress of English Poetry as Leigh Hunt.

James Henry Leigh Hunt was born at Southgate on the 19th October 1784. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, and beginning to write verses at an early age, published in 1801 a volume of poems called *Juvenilia*. Employed for a short time as a clerk in the War Office, he quitted that service in 1808 to undertake the editorship of *The Examiner*, a journal recently started by his brother John, and conducted mainly in the interest of the New Whigs, or at least in opposition to the Tory Government, though it professed to guide public opinion

[1] See vol. ii. p. 287 and vol. v. p. 16.

on principles of independent taste. In 1813 an attack upon the Prince Regent brought upon the Editor a prosecution for libel and two years' imprisonment in Surrey gaol. On his release he naturally figured as a martyr in Whig circles, and extended the range of his literary influence.

In 1816 Hunt published his *Story of Rimini*, a poem which formed a new starting-point in the campaign against "poetical diction," begun by Wordsworth in his well-known Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. The tale was told in heroic couplets, written in a style which Hunt professed to be a return to the manner of Dryden, but which was really only a disintegration of the historic structure of the decasyllabic metre. Hunt thought it was sufficient to assert his freedom by disregarding the distinct, though varied, pause at the close of each couplet; and with this rhythmical change he combined a revolution in the character of metrical diction far more radical than that of Wordsworth. On the face of his theory, indeed, its subversive tendencies were not apparent:

"With the endeavour," says he in his Preface to the *Story of Rimini*, "to recur to a freer spirit of versification, I have joined one of still greater importance—that of having a free and idiomatic cast of language. There is a cant of art as well as of nature. But the proper language of poetry is in fact nothing different from that of real life, and depends for dignity upon the strength and sentiments of what it speaks. It is only adding musical modulation to what a fine understanding might actually utter in the midst of its griefs and enjoyments. The poet should do as Shakespeare and Chaucer did, not copy what is obsolete or peculiar, but use as much as possible an actual existing language, omitting mere vulgarisms and fugitive phrases which are cant of ordinary discourse."

In the last volume I traced the growth of the "familiar style" in English poetry.[1] I showed that it was formed gradually by a number of writers who from their position were acquainted with the character of conversation in the best society, and were able to refine and elevate this through their knowledge of the best literature of their country. I showed also by examples with what great

[1] Vol. v. chap. v.

variety this principle of *usus* was applied in the hands of masters like Prior, Pope, Gay, Swift, Goldsmith, and Cowper. But evidently the achievement of a "familiar" style in poetry must depend upon the tact of the writer in showing his perception of what is essentially meant by "mere vulgarisms and fugitive phrases"; and this perception Hunt never attained. The intense vulgarity of his breeding is characteristically revealed in his rendering of the episode of Paolo and Francesca, handled by Dante with such perfection of reserve. The following shows Hunt's conception of "the proper language of poetry . . . that depends for *dignity* upon the strength and sentiments of what it speaks":

> "May I come in?" said he—it made her start,—
> That smiling voice;—she colour'd, press'd her heart
> A moment, as for breath, and then with free
> And usual tone said,—"O yes,—certainly."
> There's wont to be, at conscious times like these,
> An affectation of a bright-eyed ease,
> An air of something quite serene and sure,
> As if to seem so, were to be, secure.
> With this the lovers looked, with this they spoke,
> With this sat down to read the self-same book,
> And Paulo, by degrees, gently embrac'd
> With one permitted arm her lovely waist;
> And both their cheeks, like peaches on a tree,
> Came with a touch together thrillingly,
> And o'er the book they hung, and nothing said,
> And every lingering page grew longer as they read.
>
> As thus they sat, and felt with leaps of heart
> Their colour change, they came upon the part
> Where fond Genevra, with her flame long nurst,
> Smil'd upon Launcelot, when he kiss'd her first:—
> That touch, at last, through every fibre slid;
> And Paulo turn'd, scarce knowing what he did,
> Only he felt he could no more dissemble,
> And kiss'd her on her mouth, *all in a tremble.*[1]

"*At conscious times like these*"! Hunt would probably have said that his every touch was but an expansion of what he found in Dante; and such is the case; but the following is the way in which the poet, who had received a liberal

[1] *Story of Rimini.*

education, in the atmosphere which produced the legislation of the Courts of Love, thinks it best to tell the story:

> Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto
> —Di Lancilotto, come amor lo strinse:
> Soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.
> Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse
> Quella letteratura, e scolorocci 'l viso;
> Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.
> Quando legemmo il disiato riso
> Esser baciato da cotanto amante,
> Questi che mai da me non sia diviso
> La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante:
> Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse:
> Quel giorno più non vi legemmo avante.[1]

After Keats' introduction by Cowden Clarke to Hunt in 1816, the latter, besides publishing many of the poet's compositions in *The Examiner*, wrote an enthusiastic review, commending his genius, together with that of Reynolds and Shelley, to the notice of the public. On his side Keats, naturally much elated by the admiration which Hunt, and the frequenters of Hunt's coterie bestowed upon his work, felt no doubts as to the complete artistic soundness of the critical position from which he was starting under the auspices of his guide. The volume of his poems published in 1817 affords many proofs of the ascendency which Hunt's opinions at this period exercised over his practice: among others it contains the poem called *Sleep and Poetry*, in which, after describing the character of Elizabethan poetry in the passage cited above, he proceeds:

> Could all this be forgotten? Yes, a schism
> Nurtured by foppery and barbarism
> Made great Apollo blush for this his land:
> Men were thought wise who could not understand
> His glories: with a puling infant's force
> They swayed about upon a rocking-horse,

[1] "We read one day, for our pleasure, of Lancelot, how he was constrained by love. We were alone, and without any suspicion. Many times that reading suspended our eyes and made pale our face; but one moment alone was what overcame us. When we read of the longed-for smile being kissed by such a lover, he who may never more be parted from me kissed me, all trembling, on the mouth. Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it: that day we read in it no further" (Dante, *Inferno*, v. 127-39).

> And thought it Pegasus. Ah! dismal-souled!
> The winds of heaven blew, the ocean rolled
> Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue
> Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
> Of summer nights collected still to make
> The summer precious: beauty was awake!
> Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
> To things ye knew not of—were closely wed
> To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
> And compass vile: so that ye taught a school
> Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
> Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
> Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
> A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
> Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
> That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
> And did not know it,—no, they went about,
> Holding a poor decrepid standard out,
> Mark'd with most flimsy mottos, and in large
> The name of one Boileau!

It is difficult to say whether the offensive or the ridiculous predominates more in this criticism. That a young man, with the slenderest education, should sneer at an author, famous among the most famous writers of France, as "one Boileau," was sufficiently arrogant; that he should suppose that masters of language like Dryden, Addison, Pope, Swift, Johnson, and Goldsmith, in their varied styles of versification, were the mechanical products of Boileau's rules, was sufficiently absurd; but that he should conceive the development of the English language in the latter part of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century to have been the result of

> A schism
> Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,

and have pictured to himself Johnson, for example, as a puling infant, "swayed about upon a rocking-horse," shows the active mischief that was being wrought in the sphere of social and literary taste by the inflated vanity of men like Leigh Hunt.

Perhaps even more pernicious to Keats than Hunt's bad taste was the atmosphere of "mutual admiration"

prevailing in the literary coterie of Hampstead, and particularly in the female portion of it. No influence is more apparent in the English poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century than that of the refined and tasteful imagination of the ladies who fixed the standard of manners in the court of Elizabeth and her successor. Vast indeed is the contrast when we compare the tone in which Ben Jonson or Donne pay their addresses to the Countess of Bedford with that adopted by Keats in his amorous poetry. His fancy was inspired by the literary images of the ages of chivalry, but he knew nothing of the spirit by which the manners of those ages were at once animated and restrained. In his *Induction to a Poem* he writes :

> Lo ! I must tell a tale of chivalry
> For large dark plumes are dancing in my eye.

He is here evidently moved by the mere external descriptions of pageants and processions in the *Story of Rimini* ; but when he comes to the tale itself, the only action performed by his chivalrous hero, Calidore, is to lift two young women off their horses—an incident over which he lingers thus :

> What a kiss
> What gentle *squeeze* he gave each lady's hand !
> How tremblingly their delicate ancles spann'd !
> Into how sweet a trance his soul was gone,
> While whisperings of affection
> Made him delay to let their tender feet
> Come to the earth ; with an incline so sweet
> From their low palfreys o'er his neck they bent :
> And whether there were tears of languishment,
> Or that the evening dew had pearl'd their tresses,
> He feels a moisture on his cheek, and blesses
> With lips that tremble, and with glistening eye,
> All the soft luxury
> That nestled in his arms.

In another poem he says that, when he sees a woman "meek, and kind, and tender," he "hotly burns to be a Calidore" ; nevertheless his fancy is always dwelling on the outward feminine form :

Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair;
Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast,
Are things on which the dazzled senses rest,
Till the fond fixed eyes forget they *stare*.

Even in his later poems he is unable to extricate himself from the vulgar and sensuous imagery that Hunt's treatment of amorous subjects had evoked in his fancy. In the lines *To Fanny* he writes:

Who now, with greedy looks, eats up my feast?
What *stare* outfaces now my silver moon?
Ah! keep that hand unravish'd at the least;
Let, let the amorous burn—
But pr'ythee, do not turn
The current of your heart from me so soon.
O! save in charity
The quickest pulse for me.

Unquestionable as were the proofs of genius that he gave, the same marks of ill-breeding characterise Keats' poetical style so long as he remained under the influence of Hunt. His modes of versification, as displayed in his first published volume and in *Endymion*, are a signal illustration of the "cockneyisms" of the Hampstead School. In the volume of 1817 the poem beginning "I stood tiptoe," *Sleep and Poetry*, *Calidore*, and the various epistles, are all written in rhyming decasyllabic lines, running into each other after the manner recommended by Hunt. The diction is familiar, but unfortunately also vulgar: colloquial meannesses are mixed with such archaic forms as "upswimmeth"; bad rhymes ("morning—dawning," "water —shorter," "sorts—thoughts") are frequent; double or triple rhymes, suggested by mere sound, constantly offend, *e.g.*:

There must be too a ruin dark, and gloomy,
To say "joy not too much in all that's *bloomy*."

Him whose name's to every heart a solace,
High-minded and unbending William Wallace.

Miltonian storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness,
Michael in arms, and more, meek Eve's fair slenderness.

The same metre, similarly treated, is chosen for the metrical vehicle of *Endymion*, the first poem in which he sought to embody his "vast idea" of ancient mythology mixed with modern allegory, and which may therefore be regarded either as a mere story, like one of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or as an allegorical representation of Nature and Society in the sense intended by Keats. Considered in the former light, *Endymion* cannot be reckoned a success. Keats had nothing of the genius of a story-teller. He chooses as his hero a youth not less effeminate than Marino's Adonis, and the languid trickle of the metre in which the adventures and experiences of this person are recorded—a mixture of the rambling style of Browne in *Britannia's Pastorals* with Hunt's colloquialism in the *Story of Rimini*—furnishes a striking contrast to the masculine treatment of the heroic couplet by Dryden, in such a story, for example, as *Cymon and Iphigenia.*

As an allegory of life, Keats' poem is hardly more satisfactory than as a tale of action. It is difficult to discover any higher aim in it than the praise of sensuous love, compared with the activity inspired by fame and ambition; and as to the manner in which the poet uses the heroic couplet for ethical purposes, the following passage may serve as an example:

> There are who lord it o'er their fellow men
> With most prevailing tinsel, who unpen
> Their baaing vanities, to browse away
> The comfortable, green, and juicy hay
> From human pastures; or—O torturing fact!
> Who, through an idiot blink, will see unpacked
> Fire-branded foxes to sear up and singe
> Our gold and ripe-eared hopes. With not one tinge
> Of sanctuary splendour, not a sight
> Able to face an owl's, they still are dight
> By the blear-ey'd nations in empurpled vests,
> And crowns, and turbans. With unladen breasts,
> Save of blown self-applause, they proudly mount
> To their spirit's perch, their being's high account,
> Their tip-top nothings, their dull skies, their thrones—
> Amid the fierce intoxicating tones

Of trumpets, shoutings, and belabour'd drums,
And sudden cannon. Ah! how all this hums
In wakeful ears, like uproar past and gone—
Like thunder clouds that spake to Babylon,
And set those old Chaldaeans to their tasks.[1]

Keats here appears to be attacking certain persons high in authority and in the world's esteem; but who they are, or what they have to do with the story of Endymion, there is nothing to show. Metaphorical imagery is prodigally employed, but in no way serves—its only useful purpose—to make thought lucid and precise: on the contrary, the mass of invertebrate verbal matter poured forth, without any attempt at selection, obscures all meaning, bringing to mind what Keats says of his own sensations in the midst of the multiplicity of natural objects:

When it is moving on luxurious wings,
The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings.

How inartistic seems the above passage when compared with the intellectual force and delicacy shown by Goldsmith, for example,—one of Keats' "dolts,"—in subduing thought to metre through a didactic poem like *The Traveller*!

3. It is impossible, then, to pronounce *Endymion* a successful illustration of Keats' "vast idea." He himself recognised the fatal defects of the poem, and up to a certain point the harsh treatment which it experienced from the critics was deserved. But the fine quality of his genius is shown unmistakably, not only by the confidence with which, in the midst of failure, he clung to a belief in the truth of his original intuition, but still more by his severe self-judgment in noting the imperfections of his work, and in gradually recognising the limits within which his powers could be properly exercised.

Perceiving that *Endymion* fell below epic requirements through the vulgarity of its diction, he soon freed himself from the influence of Hunt; but, still aspiring to embody his "vast idea" in an epic form, he attempted to elevate his style by employing a mode of diction resembling that

[1] *Endymion*, Book iii. 1-21.

of *Paradise Lost.* As far back as September 1817, while *Endymion* was still unfinished, his imagination, as we learn from his correspondence, was occupied with "a new romance,"[1] which can only have been *Hyperion.*

He had here conceived a far more manly subject than in *Endymion*—viz. the fall of the Titans; under guise of which allegory he no doubt intended to expound his own theory, that "first in beauty should be first in might," by describing the victory of Apollo, the god of music and poetry, over Hyperion, the old Titanic ruler of the Sun. There is no evidence to show whether he ever had in his mind a complete conception of the form which his poem was to assume. *Hyperion* remains a fine torso, which, like all splendid fragments, raises great ideas of what it might have been if completed. But it is a *tour de force* rather than a poetical organism, and scarcely seems to contain in itself the embryo of a modern epic. Unprejudiced readers will probably agree with the opinion of Jeffrey: "It is sufficiently obvious that the subject is too far removed from all sources of human interest to be successfully treated by any modern author."[2] Only an uncritical enthusiasm can accept the judgment of Shelley, that "the scenery and drawing of Saturn dethroned and the fallen Titans surpass those of Satan and his rebellious angels in *Paradise Lost*—possessing more human interest—and that the whole poem is supported throughout with a colossal grandeur equal to the subject."[3] No doubt the mythological episodes in Keats' poem were suggested by their Miltonic equivalents; but for all its superhuman plan, the action of *Paradise Lost* accommodates itself to the accepted scheme of Christian theology; its angelic characters, colossal as they are, resemble those of mankind; and the conduct of the poem is characterised by a beautiful unity of conception. In *Hyperion*, on the contrary, there is no action; the speeches of the Titans suggest parallels to the debate between Milton's fallen angels, much to the dis-

[1] Letter to Haydon of September 28, 1817.
[2] *Edinburgh Review* for August 1820.
[3] *Poems of John Keats* (De Selincourt), p. 494.

advantage of the modern poem: the reasoning of Oceanus and Enceladus, for instance, is but a feeble echo of the respective arguments of Milton's Belial and Moloch.

Keats himself was under no illusion as to the epic possibilities of his work. On the 22nd of September 1819 he writes deliberately to his friend Reynolds: "I have given up Hyperion."[1] He saw that, in its structure, it challenged comparison too directly with *Paradise Lost*; and, even in point of diction, he was not satisfied with the results he had attained. Instinct told him that his own tendencies led him in the direction of Chatterton, rather than of Milton; and knowing nothing of the system on which the former had constructed his poetical dialect, he had a very exaggerated conception of its value.

"The *Paradise Lost*," he writes to his brother George almost at the same time as to Reynolds, "though so fine in itself, is a corruption of our language. It should be kept as it is, unique, a curiosity, a beautiful and grand curiosity, the most remarkable production in the world—a northern dialect accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations. The *purest English, I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's.* The language had existed long enough to be entirely incorrupted of Chaucer's Gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's, cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written, but is the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another verse alone."[2]

From the first Keats had avowed his sympathy with the poetical movement initiated by Chatterton, whom, in the draft of the suppressed Preface and Inscription to *Endymion*, he calls "the most English of poets except Shakespeare," and up to a certain point there can be no doubt that his unfortunate predecessor had in view the same goal as himself. Both of them sought to create an ideal atmosphere for poetry by reviving old words and arranging them in metres and rhythms far removed from the idioms of living speech; but Chatterton was satisfied with merely imitative results: he lacked, as I have

[1] *Letters of Keats* (Colvin), p. 321. [2] *Ibid.* p. 313.

already attempted to show, the genius of a *creator*.[1] Keats possessed this; his end and aim in poetry was to find words to clothe the images of Beauty that blossomed in his fancy, in forms and colours analogous to those of painting. For the purposes of the epic or the drama, where movement and energy of action are required, this method of composition was unsuitable; but in poems involving picturesque episodes, in odes embodying a vein of sensuous reflection, in short tales of love giving scope for passages of voluptuous description, Keats' faculty of word-painting shines with incomparable brilliancy. It was the consciousness of possessing this power that, at the outset of his career, turned his fancy instinctively into the rich fields of Greek mythology; and he must have been aware that the only passages in *Endymion* that successfully incorporated his "vast idea" were the Hymn to Pan in the first Book, and the translation into words, in the fourth Book, of Titian's picture of Bacchus and Ariadne. In the latter is displayed a splendour of imagery comparable with Spenser's, when he is luxuriating in the description of an allegorical masque or pageant; nor is there, in the easy flow of Keats' metre, anything of the conscious archaism of language with which both Spenser and Chatterton "affect the obsolete." It will be observed, too, that the following passage is entirely free from the injudicious mixture of ancient words and modern colloquialisms which disfigures the rest of *Endymion*:

> And as I sat, over the light blue hills
> There came a noise of revellers: the rills
> Into the wide stream came of purple hue—
> 'Twas Bacchus and his crew!
> The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills
> From kissing cymbals made a merry din—
> 'Twas Bacchus and his kin!
> Like to a moving vintage down they came,
> Crowned with green leaves, and faces all on flame;
> All madly dancing through the pleasant valley,
> To scare thee, Melancholy!

[1] Vol. v. p. 418.

O then, O then, thou wast a simple name!
And I forgot thee, as the berried holly
By shepherds is forgotten, when, in June,
Tall chestnuts keep away the sun and moon:—
I rush'd into the folly!

. . . . . .

Whence came ye, merry Damsels! whence came ye!
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your bowers desolate,
Your lutes, and gentler fate?—
"We follow Bacchus! Bacchus on the wing,
A conquering!
Bacchus, young Bacchus! good or ill betide,
We dance before him thorough kingdoms wide:—
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our wild minstrelsy!"

Whence came ye, jolly Satyrs! whence came ye!
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your forest haunts, why left
Your nuts in oak-tree cleft?—
"For wine, for wine we left our kernel tree;
For wine we left our heath, and yellow brooms,
And cold mushrooms;
For wine we follow Bacchus through the earth;
Great God of breathless cups and chirping mirth!—
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our mad minstrelsy!"[1]

By the time that he had finished *Endymion*, Keats had realised where his imaginative strength lay, and in *Isabella*, *Lamia*, and, more particularly still, in *The Eve of St. Agnes* —all of them narrative poems—he reveals very plainly his method of composition. He cares little for the action of the story as such. His subjects are suggested to him by chance excursions into such mediaeval literature as Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*; but instead of relating his incidents swiftly and plainly, like the original authors, he fixes his imagination intently on those details of the subject which appear to be of a picturesque nature, and brings them into strong relief in a profusion of luxurious verbal imagery. For his heroes, who are always "swooning" in an amorous atmosphere, it is impossible to feel any respect; but the absorbing grief

[1] *Endymion*, Book iv. 195-240.

of Isabella for her murdered lover is sculptured in metrical words with a vivid intensity that awakes strong sympathy in the reader. After describing the discovery of Lorenzo's body and the removal of his head, the poet proceeds :

> In anxious secrecy they took it home,
> And then the prize was all for Isabel :
> She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
> And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
> Pointed each fringed lash ; the smeared loam
> With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
> She drench'd away :—and still she comb'd, and kept
> Sighing all day—and still she kiss'd, and wept.
>
> Then in a silken scarf,—sweet with the dew
> Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,
> And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
> Through the cold serpent-pipe refreshfully,—
> She wrapp'd it up ; and for its tomb did choose
> A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
> And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set
> Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet.
>
> And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
> And she forgot the blue above the trees,
> And she forgot the dells where waters run,
> And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze ;
> She had no knowledge when the day was done,
> And the new morn she saw not : but in peace
> Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
> And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.[1]

A like intensity is shown in realising pictorially the transformation of the snake in *Lamia* into a woman,—a passage which, with all its power, is too loathly for quotation, —while the description of the marriage banquet in that poem, with its gleams of red wine in golden goblets, and the reflection in the lofty mirrors of the vapours rising luxuriously from the incense, is thoroughly characteristic of Keats' genius as a painter-poet :

> Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,
> Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume :
> Before each lucid panel fuming stood
> A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
> Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
> Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft

[1] *Isabella*, li.-liii.

Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose
Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odorous.
Twelve sphered tables, by silk seats insphered,
High as the level of a man's breast rear'd
On libbard's paws, upheld the heavy gold
Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told
Of Ceres' horn, and, in huge vessels, wine
Come from the gloomy tun with merry shine.
Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood,
Each shrining in the midst the image of a God.[1]

The art of poetical word-painting culminates in the imagery employed in the opening stanza of *The Eve of St. Agnes* to express the sensations of extreme cold:

St. Agnes' Eve—ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

For gorgeousness of colour in metrical language the description of the stained-glass window in Madeline's chamber is unrivalled:

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imageries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.[2]

Keats' Odes are charged with a peculiar intensity, because in them he employs his first principle of art to illustrate his own emotional and philosophical theory of life. The idea of an unseen life in Nature, common to both Wordsworth and Keats, is arrived at by the former through a process of intellectual analysis, but forces itself

[1] *Lamia*, Part ii. [2] *Eve of St. Agnes*, xxiv.

on the mind of the latter by means of images and words. The sight of the sculptures on a Grecian Urn awakens for his imagination melodies inaudible to the ear: the song of a nightingale, floating on the dark, is the symbol to him of stable beauty in the midst of perpetually changing human misery. In the one case, he says:

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
> Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair![1]

In the same vein, though to more pessimistic effect, is the reflection in the *Ode to a Nightingale*:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
> No hungry generations tread thee down;
> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown:
> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
>
> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
> Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley glades:
> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?[2]

To sum up historically the effects of the Romantic Movement as culminating in the poetry of Keats, it is necessary to recognise how essentially its life is connected with the social causes that produced the French Revolution,

[1] *Ode on a Grecian Urn.* [2] *Ode to a Nightingale*, 7, 8.

and how vividly the secret influences that determined the successive stages of its course are revealed in the respective poetic ideals of Wordsworth, Shelley, and the author of *Lamia*. There can be no question that these three poets derived political inspiration from the same source, namely, that atmosphere of boundless hope which exalted the imagination of Europe on the eve of the French Revolution,—a state of feeling created by the belief that the revolutionary ideal of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality, would not only destroy the evils of a corrupt tradition, but would inaugurate the moral regeneration of mankind. Wordsworth, in his poetical Autobiography, describes the universal enthusiasm that prevailed on his first visit to France in 1791 :

> Nature then was sovereign in my mind,
> And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,
> Had given a charter to irregular hopes.
> In any age of uneventful calm
> Among the nations, surely would my heart
> Have been possessed by similar desire ;
> But Europe at that time was filled with joy,
> France standing on the top of golden hours,
> And human nature seeming born again.[1]

A generation passed, and in spite of the fact that the French Revolution had ended in the military despotism of Napoleon, that this had been followed by the autocracy of the Holy Alliance, and that the supremacy of the aristocracy of birth had merely been replaced by that of the aristocracy of wealth, the old republican dream of the regenerating moral powers of Liberty was still cherished by the hero of *The Revolt of Islam* :

> It must be so—I will arise and waken
> The multitude, and like a sulphurous hill,
> Which on a sudden from its snows had shaken
> The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill
> The world with cleansing fire ; it must, it will,
> It may not be restrained.[2]

Keats expresses the same belief in the expanding and

[1] Wordsworth, *The Prelude:* "Cambridge and the Alps."
[2] *Revolt of Islam*, Canto ii. 14.

cleansing influence of Liberty on the world of Imagination and Art:

> Great spirits now on earth are sojourning,
> He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
> Who, on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
> Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:[1]
> He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
> The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:[2]
> And lo!—whose steadfastness would never take
> A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.[3]
> And other spirits there are standing apart
> Upon the forehead of the age to come;
> These, these will give the world another heart,
> And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
> Of mighty workings?——
> Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.[4]

Not less universal was the effect of the disappointment of these high revolutionary hopes on the Art of Poetry. Political disenchantment inevitably led to a divorce between poetical imagination and social action. Poetry, removing its gaze from the external world, turned it inward, in the manner described by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, and looked for its inspiration from the solitary intercourse between material Nature and the individual Mind. Wordsworth indeed speaks of the genius of the Poet as if it were a single instrument, made to produce only one kind of music; but, as a matter of fact, the removal of the sphere of Poetry from social action to psychological introspection produced a conflict of poetical ideals varying according to the temperament and training of each individual imagination. The poet of *The Excursion* justifies his retreat from the world of action by the salutary moral influences of monastic meditation.

> O blest seclusion! when the mind admits
> The law of duty; and can therefore move
> Through each vicissitude of loss and gain,
> Linked in entire complacence with her choice,
> When youth's presumptuousness is mellowed down
> And manhood's vain anxiety dismissed.[5]

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Leigh Hunt. [3] Haydon.
[4] Keats' sonnet addressed to Haydon. [5] *The Excursion*, Book iv.

This did not satisfy Shelley. In the Preface to *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, he says:

> The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings. The Poet is represented as uniting these requisitions, and attaching them to a single image. He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.

Hence the character, at once social and revolutionary, of Shelley's epic and his dramas; hence, too, the emotional intensity of the lyrics in which he expresses the sufferings he endures, through his inability to find in actual life any goal for the aspirations of his thought.

Keats, in *Endymion*, represents his hero, like the poet in *Alastor*, as seeking in Nature for the "prototype of his conception"; but, unlike the latter, he endeavours, as a poet, to satisfy his imagination by embodying in words the images of his own mind. He finds an epicurean pleasure in the solitary contemplation of abstract forms of Beauty. Explaining to one of his brothers his objections to marriage, he says:

> My Happiness would not be so fine as my Solitude is sublime. . . . The mighty Abstract Idea I have of beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness. An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that Beauty—but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds.[1]

His idea of poetry differed from Wordsworth's, in that he felt that the imagination required for its satisfaction something external to itself, and from Shelley's, because he believed that its aspirations could be satisfied with the creations of Art. But he was at one with both of them in removing his artistic ideal from the action of existing society.

[1] *Letters of John Keats*, p. 180.

"At Dilke's," he writes to a correspondent, "I fell foul of politics. 'Tis best to remain aloof from people, and like their good parts, without being eternally troubled with the dull process of their every-day lives. When once a person has smoked the vapidness of the routine he must either have self-interest or the love of some sort of distinction to keep him in good humour with it. All I can say is that standing at Charing Cross, and looking East, West, North, and South, I can see nothing but dulness."[1]

In spite of this declared want of sympathy with active life, Keats nevertheless imagined that he possessed the genius of a dramatic creator. In a letter to Haydon, when in the midst of *Endymion*, he says:

I remember your saying that you had notions of a good genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought, for things which I do half at random are afterwards confirmed in a dozen features of propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare the presider?[2]

No doubt Keats was nearer to Shakespeare than he was to Wordsworth, in so far as, in poetry, he wrote, like the former, from the direct prompting of Imagination, without regard to the conscious analysis which was the poetical practice of the latter. "It appears to me," he writes to a friend, "that any man may, like the spider, spin from his own inwards his own airy citadel."[3] And this imaginative process he held to be entirely "objective."

"As to the poetical character itself," he says, "(I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself,—it has no self.—It is everything and nothing. It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen."[4]

But he failed to realise that, while it was easy for Shakespeare to write in a dramatic impersonal spirit, because he was in sympathy with the spirit of action in his own age, this liberty was not within reach of

[1] *Letters of John Keats* (Colvin), p. 343.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 14.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 73.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 184.

one educated in the self-conscious Wordsworthian atmosphere. The enthusiastic admirers of Keats take him at his own valuation, and maintain that he was always advancing towards some point of pure artistic creation. But as a matter of fact, when he endeavoured to create objectively, he constantly deceived himself as to the nature and limits of his poetical faculty. For example, he writes to his publisher, Taylor, at a late period of his poetical development:

> I have come to a determination not to publish anything I have now ready written; but, for all that, to publish a poem before long, and that I hope to make a fine one. As the marvellous is the most enticing, and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers, I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy, and to let her manage for herself. [1]

The poem he had in mind was the ill-conceived *Cap and Bells*. And again Keats actually believed that his tragedy *Otho the Great* was likely to succeed on the stage.

> "Mine, I am sure," he says, in a letter to his brother George and his wife, "is a tolerable tragedy; it would have been a bank to me, if just as I had finished it I had not heard of Kean's resolution to go to America." [2]

The following is the account given by Keats' friend Brown of the manner in which this tragedy was composed:

> At Shanklin he undertook a difficult task; I engaged to furnish him with the title, characters, and dramatic conduct of a tragedy, and he was to enwrap it in poetry. The progress of this work was curious, for while I sat opposite to him, he caught my description of each scene entire, with the characters to be brought forward, the events, and everything connected with it. Thus he went on, scene after scene, never knowing nor enquiring into the scene which was to follow, until four acts were completed. [3]

The result is of course an ill-compacted jumble, unintelligible as action and unreal in respect of character. Self-delusion must indeed have been great, when it

[1] *Letters of John Keats*, p. 333. [2] *Ibid.* p. 291.
[3] *Keats' Poetical Works* (Buxton Forman), p. xxxix.

persuaded Keats (usually a sound judge of his own work) that a manufactured play, of which the soul—that is to say, the conception and general outline of incident and character—was inspired by one imagination, while the body—the diction and rhetoric—was furnished externally by another, could ever have possessed enough unity of ideal life to arouse sympathy and emotion in the mind of a theatrical audience.

Nevertheless the experiment of *Otho the Great* is historically valuable as throwing light on the essential character of the poetical movement inaugurated by Keats. In all that he did Keats was animated by an artistic purpose; his "end and aim" in poetry was to enlarge the sphere of ideal liberty by imaginative creation. At first he fancied that he could achieve his purpose by employing the larger forms of the epic and the drama; and, as *Otho the Great* shows, he never quite abandoned the hope. But in practice he steadily contracted the "vast idea" with which he started, and, yielding to a semi-conscious artistic instinct, gave up all thought of imitating social action in an ideal form, while he concentrated his efforts on reproducing, in metrical language, but in sculpturesque or pictorial fashion, the images which he found in his own mind. Striking as were the artistic results that he produced by this method, it is an error to suppose that he succeeded in thus enlarging the sphere of poetical liberty: on the contrary, by approximating poetry to the plastic arts, he necessarily eliminated that element in the former which is derived from the imitation of *action*. His brilliant fancy brought into prominent relief the qualities that delight the imagination in the pictorial allegory of *The Faery Queene* and in the descriptions and similes of *Paradise Lost*. But this was to exalt one side of poetry at the expense of the whole: the scope of Spenser's and Milton's creation was far more comprehensive. Whatever difficulties Spenser encountered in the execution of his poetical task, his aim was an active and social one, namely, to present the character of a perfect knight or gentleman in an ideal form. With still higher artistic powers, Milton

brought all the picturesque resources of poetry to bear on the intellectual purpose of an epic work, the main end of which was "to justify the ways of God to man." The spirit of action, by which these two poets were animated, qualified one for the use of the large form of allegorical romance, and the other for the use of the classical epic. Keats, by isolating himself from the active society about him, was obliged to restrict the expression of his idea of "Abstract Beauty" within the limits of the sonnet, the ode, and the modernised "fabliau."

Thus confined, the positive artistic results that he achieved were truly admirable. Of the sonnets, the early one "On first looking into Chapman's Homer," the one anticipating Death before fulfilling his poetical designs, and the final one beginning "Bright Star," seem to be of especial excellence as examples of his pictorial genius. The imagery in them is at once appropriate and sublime. In such lines as

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien:

or

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high-piled books, in charact'ry,
> Hold like full garners the full-ripen'd grain;
> When I behold upon the night's starr'd face,
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
> That I may never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
> Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
> Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

or

> Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
> Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
> And watching with eternal lids apart,
> Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,

> The moving waters at their priest-like task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
> Or gazing on the soft new fallen mask
> Of snow upon the mountains and the moors :

in compositions like these we find, not only that "the best words are in the best places," but that each word is so charged with meaning as to hold the emotion it contains with the fixity of marble.

In *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Lamia*, the value lies not in the narrative of action (in spite of the claims advanced on its behalf, the rhythmical flow of *Lamia* compares unfavourably with Dryden's use of the heroic couplet, which it seeks to emulate), but in the extraordinary skill with which, by means of words and images, romantic stories found in old books are conjured into an illusive life, and surrounded with a warm modern atmosphere.

It is, however, in his *Odes* that Keats has most enduringly enshrined his idea of "Abstract Beauty." In these—particularly the *Nightingale*, *Autumn*, and the *Grecian Urn*—the underlying feeling is always the same, a yearning desire to merge the imagination in some ideal form of life apart from experience and action. All Keats' personality seems to be breathed into these compositions. He was *felix opportunitate mortis*. No poet has left behind him so many experimental fragments raising ideas of what he might have achieved in the way of creation had his days been longer. Yet, as I have attempted to show, with his attitude towards human life and action, he could hardly have succeeded in giving expression to his "vast idea" of poetry on an extensive scale. He himself abandoned *Hyperion*, perceiving its essential defects, as the subject of an epic poem. He made no attempt to finish the *Eve of St. Mark*, though a theme suitable to his genius. The *Cap and Bells* is a failure alike in conception and execution. But in the few years allotted to him his pen found time to "glean his teeming brain" of images that will endure as long as the English language is spoken. He was able to

express in words his abstract idea of an English Autumn with a richness of language calling up before the mind the pictures of Gainsborough or Constable:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft,
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Inspiration of the same kind made him associate with the song of the nightingale in the dark the images, at once picturesque and mysterious, of Ruth in the fields of Bethlehem and the "magic casements" of Claude's Enchanted Castle; and it suggested also the sculptural ideas in his monumental ode on the *Grecian Urn*:

O Attic Shape! Fair Attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and with trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost teaze us out of thought
As doth Eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old Age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st:
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The epigram indeed will not bear intellectual examination. A proposition of Euclid is true but it is not

beautiful; nor, if it were, could the mere knowledge of what is ideally beautiful satisfy the wants of the soul; but as an example of the power of Poetry at once to illustrate and to supplement the functions of a sister Art, the Ode itself is a marvellous performance.

A word must be added to show how faithfully, in dealing with the materials of language, Keats' hand kept in touch with the perceptions of his imagination. It is plain not only that the foundations of his poetical vocabulary were laid in his literary reading rather than in the structure of spoken English, but also that his temperament, taste, and imagination took him for his reading to authors who, in their thought and expression, were far removed from the manners of his own age. Hence, in *Endymion*—the poem in which he first endeavoured to express his "vast idea" of Nature on an ample scale—we find a reproduction of innumerable Elizabethan words and peculiarities of diction, which had been instinctively abandoned in the course of the social development of the nation. Chapman in particular, with whose translations of Homer he was well acquainted, suggested to him the use of compound epithets, not only in such perfectly legitimate combinations as (the expression that Keats so much admired) "sea-shouldering whales," but also in monstrosities like "strength-relying boar" (*Iliad*, xiii. 440), "fair young prince first-down chinned" (*Iliad*, xxiv. 306-7). Keats adopted and exaggerated Elizabethan practice in his own narrative poems with such phrases as "oaks, branch-charmèd by the earnest stars," "all her milder-moonèd body's grace," "proud-quivered loins," "sapphire-regioned star," "far-spooming Ocean," etc. etc. Another feature in his diction, which is in large measure derived from his reading of Chapman, is the prolific invention or revival of epithets ending in "y"—"nervy," "ripply," "spangly," and the like—of which practice an admirer and disciple so enthusiastic as Mr. D. G. Rossetti says: "'orby,' 'sphery,' and all such forms, are execrable and disfigure the poem (*Endymion*) throughout." Keats turns, without the least self-restraint, nouns into verbs

(*e.g.* "winging along where the great water *throes*"; "*anguished*," preterite of "to anguish"; "*passioned*," preterite of "to passion");—neuter verbs into active (*e.g.* "nervy tails *cowering* their tawny brushes"); and substantives into participles. For many of these practices, which, when his poems first appeared, excited the wrath of the critics, he could have produced precedents from his favourite Elizabethan authors; but, in his early work, he never seems to have paused to think whether a word was worth reviving in itself, how far it was in harmony with the genius of the spoken language, or even whether it was the best for the purposes of its own context. Nor did he hesitate for a moment to mix with his literary archaisms the vulgar colloquial idioms of the society in which he moved. He obviously had no suspicion of the shock he would communicate to his readers when he made his witch Circe address Glaucus—one of the personages in *Endymion*—as "Sea-flirt!"[1] or when, in the same poem, Venus says to Glaucus:

> Pr'ythee soon,
> *Even in the passing of thine honey-moon*,
> Visit my Cytherea: thou wilt find
> Cupid well-natur'd, my Adonis kind.[2]

Of these vulgar trivialities he never (except in *The Eve of St. Agnes*) quite got rid. In the midst of the diction, at once abstract and emotional, of *Isabella*, we suddenly come across this line:

> "*Good-bye! I'll soon be back.*"—"*Good-bye!*" *said she*;[3]

and in *Lamia*, a weirdly remote mediæval tale, we find the following passage:

> Let the mad poets say whate'er they please
> Of the sweets of Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,
> There is not *such a treat* among them all,
> Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
> *As a real woman*, lineal indeed
> From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.[4]

But blots of this kind become rare; and in the *Odes*

[1] *Endymion*, Book iii. 584.
[2] *Ibid*, Book iii. 923-6.
[3] *Isabella*, xxvi.
[4] *Lamia*, Part i.

and in purely pictorial poems, like *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, where his art reaches its climax, we note that he has so refined the peculiarities of diction found in his early work—archaic revival, compound formations, and invented epithets—as to give the glow of emotional life to the images of material objects observed in his own mind. The last stanza of his *Ode to Psyche* may be taken as the "abstract and brief chronicle" of his progress in Poetry:

> Yes, I will be thy priest and build a fane
> In some untrodden region of my mind,
> Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
> Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
> Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
> Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
> And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
> The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
> And in the midst of this wide quietness
> A rosy sanctuary will I dress
> With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
> With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
> With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
> Who breeding flowers will never breed the same;
> And there shall be for thee all soft delight
> That shadowy thought can win,
> A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
> To let the warm Love in!

# CHAPTER XI

## ANTI-ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY: GEORGE CRABBE

It would have been surprising had no step been taken in poetry to represent the manners and sentiments of the middle classes, which during the eighteenth century had made so great an advance in wealth and culture. Not only had English Poetry—using the word in its general acceptation—opened, in *The Canterbury Tales*, with an unrivalled picture of the constitution of English society under the mediæval order of things, but the English poetical drama during the Elizabethan era had been the faithful mirror of manners and morals to "the age and body of the time"; while, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the national genius had yielded to an irresistible tendency, which caused the imagination of the people to interest itself mainly in the portraiture of actual life. The poet who, above all others, then represented the spirit of society had made it his boast,

> That not in Fancy's maze he lingered long,
> But stooped to truth and moralised his song.

Pope, however, had employed his genius almost entirely on satirising the corruption of particular individuals in an exclusive oligarchy. The middle class of the people remained unrepresented in poetry no less than in politics; or if any attempt was made to introduce them into verse-composition, they were usually covered with a romantic veil that disguised rather than represented their real character. The time had now come for a poet, inspired with something

of the old Chaucerian humour, to turn the light of Truth on the constitution of English society, and, by exposing its shams and self-deceptions, to earn for himself from the great romantic poet of the period the praise of being "Nature's sternest painter yet her best."

George Crabbe was born on Christmas Eve, 1754. His father, salt-master—*i.e.* collector of the salt-duties—at Aldborough in Suffolk, was a man of vigorous character and some literary taste, who, having once himself been a schoolmaster, was qualified to judge of the advantages of education. Observing in his eldest son a turn for literature, he gave him, as the poet afterwards declared in his letter to Burke, "a better education than his broken fortune would have allowed" at Bungay on the borders of Norfolk, and afterwards at a school in Stowmarket, where he obtained some knowledge of mathematics and classics. Thence he was removed in his fourteenth year to serve as apprentice to a surgeon at Wickhambrook, a village near Bury St. Edmunds. His master, who combined farming with medicine, made use of him in the fields as well as in the dispensary, and his life was one of drudgery till 1771, when he was sent to complete his apprenticeship with Mr. Page, a surgeon at Woodbridge, in whose employment he became acquainted with his future wife, Sarah Elmy, the niece of Tovell, a yeoman in the village of Parham. From his early days he had been accustomed to read and write verse, and, being now in love, he celebrated his mistress in a Lady's Magazine, and obtained a prize offered by the editor for a poem on the subject of Hope. At the same time, as he tells us in his *Tales of the Hall*, he stored his mind with much human experience by listening to the anecdotes told him by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in which he lived. Before leaving Woodbridge he published at Ipswich a poem called *Inebriety*, which shows a careful study of the ethical and satirical manner of Pope. Neither these literary trifles nor the study of botany, for which he showed an early taste, were calculated to advance him in the profession of medicine, which, after a very brief

experience in London, he endeavoured to practise at Aldborough; so that, soon becoming disgusted with surgery, he resolved to try his fortune in literature. Proceeding to London with only five pounds, advanced by Dudley North, he printed in 1780 a poem called *The Candidate*, which he said, in a prefatory address, was "published with a view of obtaining the opinion of the candid and judicious reader on the merits of the writer as a poet: very few being in such cases sufficiently impartial to decide for themselves."

The encouragement he received from the Reviews was not great, and the Journal to Mira which Crabbe kept from April 21 till June 11, 1780, gives a vivid picture of struggles and disappointments in the endeavour to procure literary occupation, all of them faced with the brave spirit of one conscious of merit and resolved to persevere. At last, being at the end of his resources, he addressed a letter to Edmund Burke, in which he described his desperate position and made an admirable and manly appeal to him for help.

"About ten days since," he said, "I was compelled to give a note for seven pounds to avoid an arrest for about double that sum which I owe. I wrote to every friend I had, but my friends are poor likewise; the time of payment approached, and I ventured to represent my case to Lord Rochford. I begged to be credited for this sum till I received it of my subscribers, which I believe will be within one month; but to this letter I had no reply, and I have probably offended by my importunity. Having used every honest means in vain, I yesterday confessed my inability and obtained, with much entreaty, and as the greatest favour, a week's forbearance, when I am positively told I must pay the money or go to prison."

Burke did not hesitate for a moment. He read the verses enclosed for his inspection, sent for the author, and used his influence with the publisher Dodsley to print one of the poems, entitled *The Library*. Dodsley, though he declined to undertake any risk, agreed to do what Burke desired, exerted himself to promote the sale, and generously gave all the profits to the poet. Through Burke, Crabbe

was introduced to many men of influence, among others Sir Joshua Reynolds and Dr. Johnson, the latter of whom was delighted with *The Village*, Crabbe's second poem, which he read and revised, telling the author at the same time that he was not to feel himself under any obligation to adopt his suggested amendments, since the original lines were usually as good as his own. Finding that Crabbe was desirous to take orders, Burke used his influence with the Bishop of Norwich, who, after the poet had been admitted as deacon in London on the 21st of December 1781, ordained him priest in the following August, and licensed him as curate to the Rector of Aldborough. In a few months Burke obtained for him a new appointment as domestic chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, and while at Belvoir Castle his poem *The Village*, published in May 1783, obtained for its author an extensive popularity.

Soon afterwards the Lord Chancellor, Thurlow, gave him the small livings of Frome St. Quintin and Evershot in Dorsetshire, to legalise which appointment he received from the Archbishop of Canterbury the degree of LL.B. The Duke of Rutland, having been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, was obliged to leave Belvoir; but he invited Crabbe to remain in the Castle, and there accordingly, after his marriage with Miss Elmy in December 1783, the poet continued to reside till his appointment as curate in Stathern, a small village in the same neighbourhood. In February 1789 he was allowed by the Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of Canterbury to exchange his Dorsetshire livings for those of Muston and Allington, the former in Leicestershire, the latter in Lincolnshire. During his residence at Stathern he printed *The Newspaper* in 1785, but from that date, for a period of twenty-two years, the only literary work which he seems to have intended for publication was an Essay on Botany, which, being written in English, he suppressed at the instance of the Vice-Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. He, nevertheless, wrote much in MS., which he allowed his children to destroy in periodical bonfires. In 1792 by the death of Tovell,

his wife's uncle, he became owner of the farm at Parham, and did work as a clergyman in some of the neighbouring villages, but after the death of one of his children, whereby his wife's health was injuriously affected, he removed to Great Glenham Hall, a house belonging to Dudley North, and afterwards to Rendham, in the same neighbourhood, whence he returned in 1807 to Muston, being required by Pretyman, Bishop of Lincoln, to reside in his living.

In September 1807 *The Parish Register* was published, and was followed in 1810 by *The Borough*. *Tales in Verse* appeared in 1812. All these works were received very favourably by the public. Mrs. Crabbe died in the autumn of 1813, and in 1814, having been presented to the living of Trowbridge in Wiltshire, the poet finally left Muston. In his new living the neighbourhood of Bowood and Longleat, and the interest felt in literature by Lord Landsdowne and Lord Bath, drew him gradually into society, where he made the acquaintance of most of the leading writers of the day, including Bowles, Rogers, Moore, Campbell, and Frere, with others who were attracted to the great centre of Whig poetry and politics, Holland House. His *Tales of the Hall* were published in 1819 by John Murray, who gave Crabbe for these and for the remaining copyright of his earlier works £3000. During one of his visits to London in 1822 he met for the first time Sir Walter Scott, who, having been long desirous of his personal friendship, invited him to Scotland, where he stayed for some months at Abbotsford and in Scott's house at Edinburgh. After *Tales of the Hall* Crabbe published no more verse, but he left behind him some "Posthumous Tales." He died on the 3rd of February 1832, and was buried in the parish church at Trowbridge, where a monument is erected to him.

On his reappearance as a poet in the early years of the nineteenth century, Crabbe's genius was judged from opposite points of view by Gifford and Jeffrey, the two most representative critics of the time. Gifford, while praising the dramatic power and intensity of his poems in their individual details, censured Crabbe for his apparently

deliberate purpose of restricting the view of poetry to the realities of life, and of excluding from it all the idealism of Romance.[1] Jeffrey, on the contrary, commended the bold "objectivity" characterising Crabbe's descriptions of real life, and, pleading that it extended the range of human sympathy, contrasted it favourably with the metaphysical idealism advocated in the doctrines of the Lake School: he blamed the author of *The Village* only for the want of taste and selection often shown by him in the application of his poetical principles.[2] Taken together these respective opinions furnish a very comprehensive view of the difficulties involved in Crabbe's poetical practice; but, historically, a clearer perception of its significance may be obtained if it is considered in its relation to the general movement of English poetry in the eighteenth century. Crabbe's genius touches at one end what may be called the conventional pastoralism brought into fashion by the Classical Revival, and at the other the pastoral idealism of the Lake School, which, as we have seen, grew up contemporaneously with the French Revolution. His own manner is the product of that ethical and satirical tendency which had obtained a gradual but complete mastery over the English imagination between these two extreme points.

Conventional Pastoralism, introduced into England from Italy on the tide of the Classical Renaissance, had been employed, since the publication of *The Shepheardes Calender*, as the vehicle of courtly compliment or theological doctrine; but, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, it had dwindled into a mere literary fashion, the main rules for which had been prescribed by Fontenelle:

> I' faut aussi que les sentimens dont on fait la matière des Eglogues soient plus fins et plus delicats que ceux des vrais Bergers, mais il faut leur donner la forme la plus simple et la plus champestre qu'il soit possible.[3]

Courtly etiquette required the lover to celebrate his

[1] *Quarterly Review* for November 1810.
[2] *Edinburgh Review* for April 1808. [3] *Discours sur L'Eglogue.*

mistress under some name proper to a romantic shepherdess, a fashion which by degrees filtered so far into the middle classes of society that, at the time of the Revolution of 1688, we find the mad *bookseller*, Dunton, rhapsodising to his 'Iris,' and almost a hundred years afterwards, Crabbe thinks it fitting to transform his homely Sarah into the pastoral 'Mira.' An idyllic atmosphere, congenial to these romantic surroundings, was expected in all pastoral compositions, on the principle defined by Pope: "If we would copy nature it may be useful to take this idea along with us, that pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden Age."[1]

A convention so utterly incongruous with the civil development of society could not fail to arouse a perception of the ridiculous in a people like the English, with whom a sense of humour is always strong, though often latent; and Johnson, a typical Englishman, in spite of his attachment to classical form, never missed an opportunity in his criticism to proclaim his contempt for the unrealities of modern pastoral poetry. In the opening lines of *The Village*, Crabbe gave forcible expression to a widespread sense that the literary tradition of the "Golden Age" was an obsolete superstition, which could no longer serve any poetical purpose:

> The Village Life, and every care that reigns
> O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;
> What labour yields, and what, that labour past,
> Age in its hour of languor, finds at last;
> What form the real Picture of the Poor,
> Demand a song—the Muse can give no more.
>
> Fled are those times when, in harmonious strains,
> The rustic poet praised his native plains:
> No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse,
> Their country's beauty or their nymphs rehearse;
> Yet still for these we frame the tender strain,
> Still in our lays fond Corydons complain,
> And shepherd boys their amorous pains reveal,
> The only pains, alas! they never feel.
>
> Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains,
> Because the Muses never felt their pains:

[1] Preface to *Pastorals*.

> They boast their peasants' pipes; but peasants now
> Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough;
> And few, amid the rural tribe, have time
> To number syllables and play with rhyme.

The contrast between the shepherd as he actually existed and as he was represented in poetry was a theme for satire highly agreeable to the shrewd "urbanity" of Johnson. But another aspect of Crabbe's genius brought him into full view of a school of poetry to which Johnson's instincts would have been as strongly opposed as they were to the classical affectations of the modern Eclogue. It is noticeable that, in the opening of his poem, he declares that "the village life" and "what form the real Picture of the Poor" '*demand* a song.' He thus came within measurable distance of the doctrines of the Lake poets. We have already seen how, when Wordsworth and Coleridge were casting about for new themes of poetry, they determined that "one class of subjects was to be chosen from ordinary life: the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them or to notice them when they present themselves." Crabbe also maintains that matter for poetical composition is to be found in the common life of the people; and as Wordsworth dwells upon incidents in the existence of Betty Foy, Harry Gill, and Goody Blake, so the actors in Crabbe's tales bear the homely names of Phœbe Dawson, Edward Shore, and Peter Grimes. But here the resemblance between the two schools of poetry ceases and a vivid contrast begins.

Crabbe's treatment of common life in poetry is dramatic and satiric; the poetical method of the Lake School is always lyrical. Crabbe argues in effect that tragic subjects may be found in the experience of average men and women, in so far as they are exposed to the misfortunes and spiritual temptations common to human nature, all that is required of the imagination of the reader being an extension of sympathy which shall enable it to penetrate behind the external pomps and conventions

of established society to the reality of things. The Lake poets and critics, on the contrary, asserted that poetic imagination possesses a *creative* power capable of revealing to the reader the true nature of objects otherwise than as they appear to sense and experience. "The processes of imagination," said Wordsworth, "are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence."[1] The poetical aim of Crabbe may be described as an attempt to extend the range of imaginative sympathy, by applying the traditional forms of poetry to objects scientifically observed in the domain of actual life; the purpose of the Lake School is to make the reader sympathise with the impression of objects that have been modified and transmuted by the imagination of the poet. Wordsworth's principle is romantic, Crabbe's anti-romantic and realistic. I have already dealt with the artistic difficulties inherent in the former poet's methods: the character of poetical realism as illustrated in *The Village*, *The Parish Register*, *The Borough*, and the *Tales* must now form the subject of consideration.

*The Village* is, in conception and style, the most classical of all Crabbe's compositions. Its structure is based on the general principle that it is the duty of the poet to copy Truth in his descriptions of country life, rather than, as Pope prescribed in his *Pastorals*, "the image of what they call the Golden Age"; and all the parts of the poem are arranged with a view of bringing this central idea into strong relief. Looking on the suffering state of the labouring class, the poet asks, in lines which recall the indignant force of Juvenal or Johnson:

> Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
> In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?
> No; cast by Fortune on a frowning coast
> Which neither groves nor happy valleys boast;

[1] Preface to edition of *Poems* of 1815.

> Where other cares than those the Muse relates,
> And other shepherds dwell with other mates;
> By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
> As Truth will paint it and as Bards will not:
> Nor you, ye Poor, of letter'd scorn complain,
> To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;
> O'ercome by labour and bow'd down by time,
> Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?
> Can poets soothe you, when you pine for bread,
> By winding myrtles round your ruin'd shed?
> Can their light tales your weighty griefs o'erpower,
> Or glad with airy mirth the toilsome hour?

On this principle the general effect of the picture of the Village is made to depend on a series of vivid contrasts between the china-shepherdess view of rustic life and the actual condition of things as seen in the cottages of Aldborough. We are introduced to the "frowning coast" of Suffolk, with its population of fishermen and smugglers, —"a bold, artful, surly, savage race"; the peasant, worn-out by life-long labour, appears, passing in old age to the ruinous Poor-House, where he prays that Death may soon release him:

> "Then let my bones beneath the turf be laid,
> And men forget the wretch they would not aid."
> . . . . . .
> There lie the happy dead, from trouble free,
> And the glad parish pays the frugal fee.
> No more, O Death! thy victim starts to hear
> Churchwarden stern or kingly overseer;
> No more the former claims his humble bow;
> Thou art his lord, the best of tyrants thou!

This "sad eventful history" of progress from the cradle to the grave, painted in vigorous yet refined verse, never fails in its component parts to arouse the strong sympathy which the poet intended. The defect of *The Village*, as far as it has one, is that the general truth it represents is enforced by an excess of colouring in the particular examples. In order to make the reader feel how far he is removed from the Golden Age, his imagination is made to dwell on a soil where "clasping tares cling round the sickly blade," as if this were the typical

condition of an English farm: every dying peasant, we are led to suppose, must always retire into a house,

> Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door,
> Wherein the putrid vapours flagging play,
> And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day;

and where his last hours are rendered miserable by the parish doctor,

> A potent quack, long versed in human ills,
> Who first insults the victim whom he kills;

or by the village parson—

> A jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday's task
> As much as God or man can fairly ask.

Moreover, by a deliberately satirical treatment of his subject, Crabbe was almost inevitably led to exclude its beautiful and pathetic aspects, and hence to be, without intention, unjust to one of his predecessors who had dwelt upon these. It was generally felt, on its first appearance, that his *Village* was meant to afford a striking contrast to *The Deserted Village* of Goldsmith; and at a later date Crabbe himself seemed to confirm this belief by a couplet in *The Parish Register*:

> Since vice the world subdued and waters drown'd,
> *Auburn* and Eden can no more be found.

But Goldsmith's ethic purpose in *The Deserted Village* was not to reproduce "the image of what is called the Golden Age." The idyllic details of his poem are introduced to heighten the pathos of the situation created by the tendency of the times, to swallow up, as he, rightly or wrongly, believed, the small holdings of the peasantry in the vast unpeopled estates of richer proprietors. There can be no question that English village life in the eighteenth century often exhibited the happy side depicted by Goldsmith, though the gloomy features represented in *The Village* were of course met with only too frequently: the description, in *The Parish Register*, of "the Cot, where thrives th' industrious swain" is conceived in the same spirit as the picture of the vanished charms of *The Deserted Village*.

Indeed, *The Parish Register*, as a whole, is a varied

illustration of the view of life formed by Crabbe after eighteen years' actual experience of parish work in the little village of Muston.

> Hence good and evil mixed, but man has skill
> And power to part them, where he feels the will!
> Toil, care, and patience bless th' abstemious few;
> Fear, shame, and want, the thoughtless herd pursue.

The poetical effect of *The Village* is produced by simple descriptions, so arranged as powerfully to execute the poet's design of painting "the real Picture of the Poor." *The Parish Register* contains not only a similar imitation of external objects, but also sketches of action and character, all tending to illustrate the truth of the conclusion embodied in the lines just cited. A general idea of the curious medley of particulars embraced in the poem may be gained from the Summary of the Contents of Part I.

The village Register considered as containing principally the Annals of the Poor—State of the Peasantry as meliorated by Frugality and Industry—The Cottage of an industrious Peasant; its ornaments—Prints and Books—The Garden; its Satisfactions—The State of the Poor when improvident and vicious—The Row or Street, and its Inhabitants—The Dwellings of one of these—A Public House—Garden and its Appendages—Gamesters; rustic Sharpers, etc.—Conclusion of the Introductory Part.

BAPTISMS

The Child of the Miller's Daughter, and Relation of her Misfortune—A frugal Couple: their kind of frugality—Plea of a Mother of a natural Child: her Churching—Large Family of Gerard Ablett: his apprehensions: Comparison between his State and that of the wealthy Farmer his Master: his Consolation—An old Man's Anxiety for an Heir: the Jealousy of another on having many—Characters of the Grocer Dawkins and his Friend: their different Kinds of Disappointment—Three Infants named—An Orphan Girl and Village Schoolmistress—Gardener's Child: Pedantry and Conceit of the Father: his botanical Discourse: Method of fixing the Embryo-fruit of Cucumbers—Absurd effects of rustic Vanity: observed in the Names of their Children—Relation of the Vestry Debate on a Foundling: Sir Richard Monday—Children of various Inhabitants—The poor Farmer—Children of a Profligate: his Character and Fate—Conclusion.

The sole principle of unity in this poem is the division of the contents of the Register into Baptisms—Marriages —Deaths—classified by the shrewd comments of the Clergyman on each case, as he records the lives and manners of his parishioners in a vein of satiric humour, without any attempt at moralising, and never shrinking from an exhibition of the sordid details that come under his notice, wherever these are illustrative of human character and experience.

*The Borough* has even less technical unity. It consists of descriptions of character and manners in a sea-side town, presented in a series of twenty-four letters. As to the epistolary form of the poem, which is not explained, we may imagine that it was adopted in answer to some correspondent who, having admired the power and accuracy of observation shown in *The Parish Register*, was anxious to see these qualities applied on the more extended scale required for a picture of urban life. Crabbe describes with the minuteness of a Dutch painter every class of society and action with which he was acquainted at Aldborough. The larger variety of movement and character in the town, as compared with the country, affords the poet fuller opportunities for the exercise of his unrivalled power of realistic portrait-painting ; while the keen satiric humour (joined to a true understanding of the essential elements of tragedy and comedy), which shines in *The Parish Register*, gives him, in the narrative episodes of *The Borough*, a power over the emotions more comprehensive than that displayed in the former poem. It was this admirable skill in narration which led Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review* to express a "very strong desire to see Mr. Crabbe apply his great powers to the construction of some interesting and connected story."[1]

By these words Jeffrey afterwards explained that he simply meant to ask for "a little more of the deep and tragical passions—of those passions which exalt and overwhelm the soul—to whose stormy seat the modern muses can so rarely raise their flight—and which he has wielded

[1] *Edinburgh Review* for April 1810.

with such terrific force in his Sir Eustace Grey and the Gipsy Woman"[1]—two poems which had appeared in the volume containing *The Parish Register*. Crabbe, however, not unnaturally, supposed the reviewer to be speaking "if not of an Epic poem strictly so denominated, yet of such composition as would possess a regular succession of events, and a catastrophe to which every incident should be subservient, and which every character, in a greater or less degree, should conspire to accomplish."[2] In publishing, after no long interval, the *Tales* which followed *The Borough*, he modestly declared himself unequal to this undertaking. but while allowing that, in unconnected tales, "much is lost for want of unity and grandeur of design," he still urged that "something is gained by greater variety of incident and more minute display of character, by accuracy of description and diversity of scene: in these narratives we pass from grave to gay, from lively to severe, not only without impropriety, but with manifest advantage."[3] In a very interesting passage of his Preface he points out that he was only extending the practice of Pope to a fresh range of subjects:

> To bring forward one other example, it will be found that Pope himself has no small portion of this actuality of relation, this nudity of description, and poetry without an atmosphere; the lines beginning "In the worst inn's worst room" are an example, and others may be seen in his Satires, Imitations, and above all in his Dunciad: the frequent absence of those "Sports of Fancy" and "Tricks of strong Imagination" have been so much observed, that some have ventured to question whether even this writer were a poet; and though, as Dr. Johnson has remarked, it would be difficult to form a definition of one in which Pope should not be admitted, yet they who doubted his claim had, it is likely, provided for his exclusion by forming that kind of character for their Poet in which this elegant versifier, for so he must be then named, should not be comprehended.

Individuality and particular observation therefore remain the leading features of the *Tales*, as they were of

[1] *Edinburgh Review* for November 1812.
[2] Preface to Crabbe's *Tales*. [3] *Ibid.*

*The Parish Register* and *The Borough*, but Crabbe seems to have been haunted by the feeling that he ought to try to bring into his work something of the classic unity of treatment which had marked his early composition in *The Village*.

"It may probably be remarked," he says in his Preface to the *Tales*, "that Tales, however dissimilar, might have been connected by some associating circumstances to which the whole number might bear equal affinity, and that examples of such union are to be found in Chaucer, in Boccace, and other collectors and inventors of Tales which, considered in themselves, are altogether independent; and to this idea I gave so much consideration as convinced me that I could not avail myself of the benefit of such artificial mode of affinity."

However, he evidently reconsidered the problem, for in *Tales of the Hall*, the last of the poetical works published in his lifetime, a certain unity is imparted to the subject, resembling the links of connection in the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron*. Two brothers, who have been separated since youth, are supposed to have been brought together in their declining years, and to amuse each other by the narrative of adventures that have happened to themselves or to people in the neighbourhood. Very little invention is required for such a simple plot, and the Tales are stamped with the same characteristics as those in the earlier collection, namely, keen humour, a nice acquaintance with the sophistries of human nature, and an admirable style of narration. Crabbe's own character and experience are distributed between the persons of the two story-tellers, who are supposed to hold different opinions in politics, though both are of a temper befitting the observant attitude of the satirist as described by Pope:

> In moderation placing all my glory,
> While Tories call me Whig and Whigs a Tory.

The general view of human nature presented maintains the mixed principle defined in *The Parish Register*, and carries on the philosophic conclusions of Johnson in

*The Vanity of Human Wishes* and of Goldsmith in *The Traveller*:

> Still to ourselves in every place consign'd,
> Our own felicity we make, or find.

When we consider wherein consists Crabbe's excellence as a poet, it will probably be allowed to lie mainly in his extraordinary power of rousing the emotion of pity—sometimes even of terror—as well as of amusement, by faithful representations of human nature, as it appears in the light of actual experience. His Tales deliberately exclude the imaginative methods by which poets and writers of romance usually endeavour to interest the reader in the actions and characters of everyday life. Where others seek to select and arrange their materials in such an order as to produce striking effects of light and shadow, Crabbe relies on an unadorned narrative of human action and passion, illuminated only by the intensely penetrating rays of his own observation. To this extraordinary power of conceiving character must be added an equal skill in the handling of it in narrative verse. In his satiric portraits of individuals he often recalls the finish of Pope; in his painting of classes and types he has learned much from the sly humour of Young's *Universal Passion*; but the application of the manner of these poets to a different range of subjects gives to Crabbe's style an air of absolute originality. His use of the heroic couplet for the purpose of dramatic dialogue is inimitable.

To illustrate his practice by examples:—it is evident that Tennyson's poem of *Enoch Arden* is suggested by Crabbe's tale called *The Parting Hour*. In the former story the imagination is powerfully moved by consciously arranged dramatic contrasts, and the poet throws the whole strength of his art into those passages of the narrative in which his genius best qualifies him to excel, as in the admirable description of tropic scenery when Enoch is cast on the desert island. Crabbe also introduces a few touches of his usual Dutch minuteness to describe

the landscape in the midst of which Allen Booth, the hero of his story, has passed much of his life; but these are quite incidental. The imagined situation in *Enoch Arden* is highly dramatic, but in Crabbe's tale the action is merely a sequence of adventures, suggested by the actual experience of one of his own brothers, and illustrative of the tragic fortunes of mankind. Instead of the exceptional case of a husband returning home after long absence to find his wife wedded again, *The Parting Hour* opens with a general reflection on the vicissitudes of life, of which the particular story is to be an example:

> Minutely trace man's life; year after year,
> Through all his days let all his deeds appear,
> And then, though some may in that life be strange,
> Yet there appears no vast nor sudden change:
> The links that bind those various deeds are seen,
> And no mysterious void is left between.
> But let these binding links be all destroy'd,
> All that through years he suffer'd or enjoy'd:
> Let that vast gap be made, and then behold—
> This was the youth, and he is thus when old;
> Then we at once the work of time survey,
> And in an instant see a life's decay;
> Pains mix'd with pity in our bosoms rise,
> And sorrow takes new sadness from surprise.

An old man and woman are then described living together. Who are they? Allen and Judith were an engaged couple, but the former, when on the point of going to sea to seek his fortune, was carried off by a press-gang, and returned no more to his native village till forty years had gone by, when he found, of course, all things changed. He himself had been taken prisoner by the Spaniards, and sold into slavery in a land where, as there seemed to be no escape from it, he married a Spanish wife, and had children. Gradually acquiring wealth, he became an object of envy, and was eventually forced to flee for his life on account of his religion, leaving his wife and children behind him. Broken in health and strength, he contrived at length to find his way to his first home, and there his declining days were tended

by his old love Judith, who had also married, but had become a widow. A touching picture is drawn of her as she watches Allen asleep in his chair; while the concluding lines of the poem, in the intensity of their dramatic pathos, are highly characteristic of Crabbe's narrative style:

> And where is he? Ah! doubtless in those scenes
> Of his best days, amid the vivid greens,
> Fresh with unnumber'd rills, where every gale
> Breathes the rich fragrance of the neighb'ring vale.
> Smiles not his wife, and listens as there comes
> The night-bird's music from the thick'ning glooms?
> And as he sits, with all these treasures nigh,
> Blaze not with fairy-light the phosphor-fly,
> When like a sparkling gem it wheels illumin'd by?
> This is the joy that now so plainly speaks
> In the warm transient flushing of his cheeks;
> For he is list'ning to the fancied noise
> Of his own children, eager in their joys:
> All this he feels, a dream's delusive bliss
> Gives the expression and the glow like this.
> And now his Judith lays her knitting by,
> These strong emotions in her friend to spy,
> For she can fully of their nature deem—
> But see! he breaks the long-protracted theme,
> And wakes, and cries—"My God! 'twas but a dream."

Not less characteristic is the striking story of *The Patron*, which seems to have suggested Tennyson's poem *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*. A boy-genius, sprung of the farmer class, having assisted a young member of a great family to win a contested election, receives an invitation to his noble friend's house.

> Now was the sister of his Patron seen—
> A lovely creature, with majestic mien;
> Who softly smiling, while she look'd so fair,
> Prais'd the young poet with a friendly air;
> Such winning frankness in her looks express'd,
> And such attention to her brother's guest;
> That so much beauty, join'd with speech so kind,
> Rais'd strong emotions in the poet's mind;
> Till reason fail'd his bosom to defend
> From the sweet power of this enchanting friend.

The result is the same as in the case of Lady Clara Vere

de Vere, though the catastrophe is less melodramatic: the genius declares his passion, is dismissed with contempt by Lady Emma, and with promises of future advancement by the Patron:

> Then came the Noble Friend—And will my Lord
> Vouchsafe no comfort, drop no soothing word?
> Yes, he must speak: he speaks, "My good young friend,
> You know my views; upon my care depend;
> My hearty thanks to your good father pay,
> And be a student.—Harry, drive away."

In the romantic treatment of *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, which is lyrical, it is, of course, necessary that all the attention should be fixed on the want of heart in the aristocratic flirt, that the situation should end in suicide, and that the poet, himself addressing Lady Clara, should report how the mother of one of her victims

> Spake some certain things of you,
> Indeed I heard one bitter word
> That scarce is fit for you to hear.

In *The Patron*, conformably with Crabbe's principle of stern realism, the genius is cured of his love-delusion, but, failing to receive any further help from the Earl, falls into a decline, and dies.

> My Lord, to whom the poet's fate was told,
> Was much affected, for a man so cold:
> "Dead!" said his Lordship, "run distracted, mad!
> Upon my soul I'm sorry for the lad;
> And now, no doubt, the obliging world will say
> That my harsh usage help'd him on his way:
> What! I suppose I should have nurs'd his muse,
> And with champagne have brighten'd up his views;
> Then had he made me fam'd my whole life long,
> And stunn'd my ears with gratitude and song.
> Still should the father hear that I regret
> Our joint misfortune—Yes! I'll not forget."

Even the boy's father—a kind of Polonius, who had given his son much sound advice on the eve of the visit to his patron—comes under the cool dramatic observation of the satirist. Instead of pouring out imprecations on

Lady Emma, after the manner of "Young Lawrence's" mother,

> The father to his grave convey'd
> The son he lov'd, and his last duties paid.
>
> "There lies my Boy," he cried, "of care bereft,
> And, Heaven be prais'd, I've not a genius left:
> No one among ye, sons, is doom'd to live
> On high-rais'd hopes of what the Great may give;
> None, with exalted views and fortunes mean,
> To die in anguish, or to live in spleen:
> Your pious brother soon escap'd the strife
> Of such contention, but it cost his life;
> You then, my sons, upon yourselves depend,
> And in your own exertions find the friend.

In Crabbe's realism there is calculated art. He seems to revel in the representation of sordid particulars, but he does so for a purpose. Thus the powerful tale called "Resentment" exhibits the character and conduct of a trusting wife, who, having given over all her fortune to her husband, loses it through his fraudulent dealings. She never forgives the treachery. Reduced to extreme poverty, she endures it bravely; afterwards, being restored by a legacy to affluence, she sees her husband sink under her very eyes into the lowest depths of misery, without an attempt to help him, until at last he dies of sheer distress. The portrait of the husband is painted in the most minute detail, in such a way as to bring out his average respectability, his cool prudence, and his apparent trustworthiness: we are even told the colour of his dress:

> His dress became him; it was neat and plain,
> The colour purple, and without a stain.

Nothing in the apparently mild and trusting temper of the wife foreshadows the iron relentlessness with which she treats her husband's fraudulence; but the strength of her character is dramatically indicated by its contrast with the soft and forgiving nature of the servant who lives with her, and who has passed through somewhat similar experiences. Pity for the absolutely starving condition of her husband at last induces the wife to send him food

and wine; but even then she bids her servant observe whether the creature is capable of showing any gratitude. Susan hurries off on her errand of relief, and the poem concludes thus:

> This done, the mistress felt disposed to look,
> As self-approving, on a pious book;
> Yet to her native bias still inclined,
> She felt her act too merciful and kind;
> But when, long musing on the chilling scene
> So lately past—the frost and sleet so keen—
> The man's whole misery in a single view—
> Yes! she could think some pity was his due.
>
> Thus fix'd, she heard not her attendant glide
> With soft slow steps—till, standing by her side,
> The trembling servant gasp'd for breath, and shed
> Relieving tears, then utter'd, "He is dead!"
>
> "Dead!" said the startled Lady.—"Yes, he fell
> Close at the door where he was wont to dwell;
> There his sole friend, the Ass, was standing by,
> Half dead himself, to see his Master die."
>
> "Expired he then, good Heaven! for want of food?"—
> "No! crusts and water in a corner stood:—
> To have this plenty, and to wait so long,
> And to be right too late, is doubly wrong:
> Then every day to see him totter by,
> And to forbear—Oh! what a heart had I!"
>
> "Blame me not, child! I tremble at the news."
> "'Tis my own heart," said Susan, "I accuse:
> To have this money in my purse,—to know
> What grief was his, and what to grief we owe;
> To see him often, always to conceive
> How he must pine and languish, groan and grieve,
> And every day in ease and peace to dine,
> And rest in comfort!—What a heart is mine!"

An almost equally powerful representation of the hardening effects of avarice on the affections is given in "Procrastination," a story told with the same minute realism as "Resentment." It must be allowed that these peculiar excellences of manner often betray Crabbe into the faults which are naturally akin to them. He shows himself insensible to the disgust which the reader feels

on constantly encountering in poetry prosaic modes of expression improper to the conditions of metre. Knowing his strength to lie in the handling of dramatic realities, he often fails to perceive that particularity of description is not suitable to groups and classes of commonplace objects. Where these admit of satiric discrimination he can be lively and animated; and his vivacious portraits of the Calvinist and the Arminian, in the fourth letter of *The Borough*, occasioned much heart-burning among the representatives of those religious sects. But satire could find no proper mark on such ground as "Trades," "Amusements," "Clubs," and similar varieties of municipal life; all of which, however, Crabbe faces in his description of the Borough with phlegmatic perseverance, forcing the reader to march with him over long prosy flats of commonplace, of which the following lines may be taken as an example:

> Soon as the season comes, and crowds arrive,
> To their superior rooms the wealthy drive,
> Others look round for lodging snug and small,
> Such is their taste—they've hatred to a hall:
> Hence one his fav'rite habitation gets,
> The brick-floor'd parlour which the butcher lets;
> Where through his single light he may regard
> The various business of a common yard,
> Bounded by backs of buildings form'd of clay,
> By stables, sties, and coops, et cætera.[1]

Even in Crabbe's most powerful passages of dramatic narrative the reader can hardly avoid stumbling over some incredible vulgarism of phrase or meanness of metrical idiom. We have, in fact, to take his narrative style as we find it, remembering that his prosaisms are almost inherent in his subject, and that they are usually employed to bring the tragic sense of an apparently commonplace situation into just relief. Far from attempting with Wordsworth to transmute the nature of external objects by means of imagination, Crabbe takes pleasure in reproducing the images of them with scientific exactness. On the other hand, he is unequalled in his power of describing

[1] *The Borough*, Letter ix.

the manner in which the appearances of Nature ally themselves with passions of the human mind, and how they vary their aspects according to the mood of the beholder. A whole poem, *The Lover's Journey*, is devoted to a vivid illustration of the theme:

> It is the Soul that sees: the outward eyes
> Present the object, but the Mind descries,
> And thence delight, disgust, or cool indifference rise.

The following extracts will show that the art with which Crabbe can paint external Nature is not inferior to that with which he observes and records the subtle movements of the soul. The first passage describes Peter Grimes, a fisherman who has been in the habit of murdering his apprentices, alone in his boat on the Suffolk coast at low tide:

> When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day,
> Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,
> Which on each side rose swelling, and below
> The dark warm flood ran silently and slow;
> There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,
> There hang his head, and view the lazy tide
> In its hot slimy channel slowly glide;
> Where the small eels that left the deeper way
> For the warm shore within the channel play;
> Where gaping mussels, left upon the mud,
> Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood;—
> Here dull and hopeless he'd lie down and trace
> How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race,
> Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry
> Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;
> What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,
> And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,
> Gave from the salt ditch-side the bellowing boom:
> He nurs'd the feelings these dull scenes produce,
> And loved to stop beside the opening sluice;
> Where the small stream, confin'd in narrow bound,
> Ran with a dull, unvarying, saddening sound;
> Where all, presented to the eye or ear,
> Oppress'd the soul with misery, grief, and fear.[1]

In the second passage a lover, who has entangled himself in a fatal engagement, looks out on the landscape:

[1] *The Borough*, Letter xxiii.

That evening all in fond discourse was spent,
When the sad lover to his chamber went,
To think on what had pass'd, to grieve, and to repent:
Early he rose, and look'd with many a sigh
On the red light that fill'd the eastern sky:
Oft had he stood before alert and gay,
To hail the glories of the new-born day;
But now dejected, languid, listless, low,
He saw the wind upon the water blow,
And the cold stream curl'd onward as the gale
From the pine-hill blew harshly down the dale;
On the right side the youth a wood survey'd,
With all its dark intensity of shade;
Where the rough wind alone was heard to move,
In this, the pause of nature and of love,
When now the young are rear'd, and when the old,
Lost to the tie, grow negligent and cold:
Far to the left he saw the huts of men,
Half hid in mist that hung upon the fen;
Before him swallows, gathering for the sea,
Took their short flights and twitter'd on the lea;
And near the bean-sheaf stood, the harvest done,
And slowly blacken'd in the sickly sun;
All these were sad in nature, or they took
Sadness from him, the likeness of his look,
And of his mind: he ponder'd for a while,
Then met his Fanny with a borrow'd smile.[1]

In the minuteness of his descriptions, and in his close psychological analysis, Crabbe may be said to anticipate Balzac; but he is superior to the French writer in humanity—in the sympathy, that is to say, with which he regards the frailty of man's nature, and in the elevation which he gives even to its depravity, by viewing it in the light of religion. Balzac seems to take a certain pleasure in the calm observation of the meannesses he describes, and thereby justly exposes himself to the censure which Aristotle directs against those who paint evil for its own sake;[2] but no one can read a tale like "Resentment" without feeling that the poet has represented his incidents in their true human relation, and has extracted from them the fitting moral.

[1] *Tales of the Hall*: "Delay has Danger." [2] *Poetics*, xv. 5.

# CHAPTER XII

## THE ROMANCE OF HISTORY

### Modern Minstrelsy: Walter Scott; The Ettrick Shepherd

We have hitherto watched the operation of Romance in English Poetry mainly in its revolutionary aspect. The note that has been sounded implies a quarrel between poetic imagination and the established order of things. Romanticism presents itself historically in an infinite number of shapes, varying according to national and individual character. It assumes sometimes the garb of sophistical analysis, as in France and Germany, sometimes of philosophical reflection, as in England. Its inspiration may be found, as with Rousseau and Goethe, in sexual sentimentalism; in a passionate love of solitary Nature, as with Wordsworth; in Byron's rebellion against social restrictions; in Keats' æsthetic revolt from bourgeois vulgarity. But in each case the poetical impulse is given by a self-consciousness out of harmony with the traditional development of civil society. Most of the foregoing chapters have exhibited the course of the Romantic insurrection in England, where its character was largely determined by revolutionary influences derived from the Continent: we have now to remove our gaze to a northern nation, where, in spite of many counteracting forces, Romance is seen blending spontaneously with the life and action of society itself:

> via prima salutis,
> quod minime reris, Graia pandetur ab urbe.

In no country of Europe were the centrifugal tendencies impeding the course of united national action so strong as in Scotland. With a struggling chaos of races—Picts, Scots, Saxons, Norsemen, and Normans—ages passed before the popular mind in Scotland could be familiarised with the idea of a single kingdom. And when this stage was at last reached, and the conception of a still larger unity formed by the introduction of the feudal system, the passion of the people for independence was so vehement that Britain north of the Tweed scorned the thought of homage to the larger kingdom of the South ; and Wallace, as the champion of Scottish freedom, became its national hero. The independent realm, constituted by the genius of Bruce, soon developed within itself the principle of disintegration, and though successive monarchs of the Stuart line strove perseveringly, after the example of other European sovereigns, to establish a strong central authority, they were never able for any length of time to make head against the opposing currents of feudalism and tribal clanship.

To these causes of secular confusion were added the divisions caused by the movement of the Reformation. A divergence of religious faith arose between the Sovereigns and the great body of their people, headed by a considerable section of the nobility ; and even when England and Scotland were brought into closer relation by the union of their crowns in a single family, each was repelled from the other by the antagonism of the Episcopal and Presbyterian forms of church government, severally established in the two countries. At a still later period, after the Act of Union in 1707, old and deeply rooted sentiments encouraged a feeling of separation between them : the attachment of the northern country to the line of its banished monarchs ; historical recollections of the struggle between Episcopalians and Covenanters ; and, above all, the pride of old nationality ; contributed to keep alive in the Scottish mind a certain dislike of the central authority represented by the Hanoverian dynasty. Nevertheless the

good sense of the people, combined with the civilising influences of time, made Scotland acquiesce, in spite of traditional prejudices, in the material benefits produced by the Union. We have noted in very early ages the refining effects on Scottish literature of the introduction into the country of Chaucer's school of poetry by James I.; and the reconciling action of the Renaissance on the English and Scottish genius—illustrated by the influence of Lyndsay and Drummond of Hawthornden in the South, and by that of Addison on the literary society of Edinburgh—never ceased to operate with mutual advantage to the public taste.

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century the evidence of a turbulent history was everywhere visible even in the superficial life of the country. While the benefits of a settled civilisation displayed themselves in widespread signs of growing wealth and prosperity, monuments of the wars of the past were crowded round the great centres of art and commerce, warning the imagination of the instability of all human affairs. Middle-aged men had witnessed the Jacobite rising of 1745: the fields of Prestonpans and Falkirk reminded the citizens of Edinburgh of the dangers to which they had recently been exposed from the deep-rooted feudalism of their Highland countrymen. Within varying but always easy distance of the capital, the ruined abbeys of Kelso, Dryburgh, and Melrose spoke to the imagination of the ancient struggle between Mediaeval Catholicism and the Reformers of religion. Above all, the Border counties, with their memories of historic international battles and their remains of peel and watch-tower, bearing witness to many a free-fight between the rough-riding cattle-drivers of Cumberland and Dumfriesshire, recalled days when affairs were by no means managed according to the principles of the Society of Writers to the Signet. Something of ancient feudal anarchy had even stamped itself on the character of the Scottish representatives of Law and Letters in the eighteenth century, whose wild conviviality would have appeared no less barbarous to the

Benchers of the Temple in London than did the pugilistic encounters between the opposing factions of the Edinburgh University students to the somewhat sleepy colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. The genius of a country so full of active energy failed not to embody itself in poetry and fiction; and it was her happy mixture of Law and Liberty that enabled Scotland to play so leading a part in the history of the Romantic movement in English literature, and to produce so complete a representative of national character as the great author of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and the Waverley novels.

Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh on the 15th of August 1771. He derived his lineal descent on his father's side from the Scotts of Harden, a branch of the family of Buccleuch, while his mother, Anne Rutherford, had in her veins the blood of the Swintons, "a family," says her son, "which produced many distinguished warriors during the middle ages, and which for antiquity and honourable alliances may rank with any in Britain." The Scotts of the elder generations had all been Tories, and even Jacobites; but Robert, Walter Scott's grandfather, had become a Whig. Robert's son, who adopted the profession of Writer to the Signet, was a zealous Hanoverian and (as was also his wife) a strict Calvinist; so that while, on the one side, the imagination of young Walter was fired by the warlike, hard-riding, freebooting memories of his remoter ancestry, on the other the orderly, somewhat Puritanical habits of his immediate progenitors helped to develop in him the faculty of sound judgment. When about eighteen months old his right leg was affected with infant paralysis, leaving him an infirmity from which he never completely recovered. In his earliest years he was accordingly sent often for his health's sake to the farm-house of Sandy-Knowe, the residence of his paternal grandfather; and it is interesting to compare the influence on him of the landscape in the midst of which he lived as a child with Wordsworth's description of the effect of Nature on his own infant mind.

"He says," so writes his biographer, Lockhart, "that his consciousness of existence dated from Sandy-Knowe; and how deep and indelible was the impression which its romantic localities had left on his imagination, I need not remind the readers of *Marmion* and *The Eve of St. John*. On the summit of the Crags which overhang the farm-house stands the ruined tower of Smailholme, the scene of that fine ballad; and the view from thence takes in a wide expanse of the district in which, as has been truly said, every field has its battle and every rivulet its song:

> The lady looked in mournful mood,
> Looked over hill and vale,
> O'er Mertoun's wood, and Tweed's fair flood,
> And all down Teviotdale;

Mertoun, the principal seat of the Harden family, with its noble groves; nearly in front of it, across the Tweed, Lessudden, the comparatively small but still venerable and stately abode of the Lairds of Raeburn; and the hoary Abbey of Dryburgh, surrounded with yew-trees as ancient as itself, seem to lie almost below the feet of the spectator. Opposite to him rise the purple peaks of Eildon, the traditional scene of Thomas the Rhymer's interview with the Queen of Faerie; behind are the blasted peel which the seer of Erceldoun himself inhabited, 'the Broom of the Cowden-knowes,' the pastoral valley of the Leader, and the bleak wilderness of Lammermoor. To the eastward, the desolate grandeur of Hume Castle breaks the horizon as the eye travels towards the range of the Cheviot. A few miles westward, Melrose, 'like some tall rock with lichens grey,' appears clasped amidst the windings of the Tweed; and the distance presents the serrated mountains of the Gala, the Ettrick, and the Yarrow, all famous in song. Such were the objects that had painted the earliest images on the eye of the last and greatest of the Border Minstrels."[1]

While the imagination of Wordsworth was confirmed in habits of mystical contemplation among the Cumberland hills, the view from Sandy-Knowe roused in Scott ideas of romantic action, which, during the whole of his life, he continued to translate into some imaginative form. Sent to the High School in Edinburgh when seven years old, he contrived, in spite of his lameness, to fight his way among his companions and to join in the "Bickers" which broke out between the boys belonging to the higher and lower ranks of society in the capital. Accord-

[1] *Life of Scott*, chap. ii. Compare pp. 163-4 *ante*.

ing to his own account he neglected his books, and so, on the whole, "made a brighter figure in the *yards* than in the *class*." He seems, however, to have become more studious when he reached the higher part of the school under the Rector, Dr. Adam, from whom he acquired a certain amount of Latin scholarship, which he might have increased when, in 1783, he entered the Humanity class in the College of Edinburgh. But as he had been taught no Greek, "finding myself," he says, "far inferior to all my fellow-students, I could hit upon no better mode of vindicating my equality than by professing my contempt for the language, and my resolution not to learn it." At the same time he "forswore the Latin classes for no reason" (he says) "I know of unless because they were akin to the Greek." His love of monkish history saved him from altogether dropping the study of the Latin language, and he continued to cultivate his mind by attending the Philosophy class of Dugald Stewart, the History class taught by Alexander Tytler, and the classes of Civil and Municipal Law. He also pursued the unregulated wanderings through English and other modern literatures which he had begun at a very early age.

In 1786 he was bound to his father as a Writer's Apprentice, and for four years worked steadily amid the intricacies of Scotch law, amusing his leisure by long excursions into ballad poetry, old chronicles, and other antiquarian literature. His experiences during this portion of his life are vividly reflected in many of his novels, notably *Guy Mannering*, *Waverley*, *Rob Roy*, and *Redgauntlet*. The last named in particular contains characteristic portraits of his father and himself, in the persons of Saunders and Alan Fairford. While by his legal studies he was able to trace all the curious veins and arteries that conveyed the social life-blood of his country, long rambles in vacation time furnished him with innumerable glimpses, of which he was in later years quick to avail himself, into the character of the people. His sociable disposition inclined him to talk freely with representatives of all classes, and

the life-like traits in many of his secondary fictitious characters, such as the Baron of Bradwardine, Dandie Dinmont, Meg Dods, and Jonathan Oldbuck, are derived from reminiscences of adventure during the early years of his association with Scottish Law.

In June 1792 he was called to the Bar, but, though he obtained a certain amount of practice through his father's connection, it does not appear that he ever distinguished himself as an advocate after the manner of Alan Fairford, in the case of Poor Peter Peebles, described in *Redgauntlet*. On the other hand, the adventures of that hero with Darsie Latimer and "Green-mantle" are in many respects based upon Scott's own companionship with his friend William Clerk, and give glimpses of a love-affair which occupied his imagination in the years 1790-96. During these years he had made acquaintance with the works of the contemporary German poets, and in 1795, being particularly struck with Bürger's ballad, *Lenore*, he began his first experiment in this class of poetry by a translation of it, which he published together with his translation of *The Wild Huntsman* in October 1796. About a year later he translated Goethe's *Erl-King*. Almost at the same time he engaged himself to Charlotte Margaret Carpenter (daughter of Jean Charpentier, a French Royalist), to whom he was married on the 24th of December 1797. In 1798, having settled with his wife in Edinburgh, he made the acquaintance of Matthew Gregory ("Monk") Lewis, who was then seeking contributions towards his *Tales of Wonder*. Lewis gladly agreed to insert *Lenore* and *The Wild Huntsman* in his collection, and used his influence with the bookseller Bell for the publication of Scott's translation of Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*. Walter Scott, the father, died in April 1799. In the summer of that year his son produced what he himself calls his "first serious attempts in verse," namely, *Glenfinlas*, *The Eve of St. John*, *The Grey Brother*, and *The Fire King*, all of which reflect a mood of imagination stimulated by the undertaking to contribute towards *Tales of Wonder*.

Lewis's volume was slow in appearing; and meantime Scott suggested to James Ballantyne, a printer in Kelso, the publication of a collection of old Border ballads, a proposal to which the latter gladly acceded. Scott's appointment by the Duke of Buccleuch to the office of Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire increased his income by £300 a year, and, as the business of that post was not arduous, gave him leisure to enlarge the materials he had already collected for the *Minstrelsy*. In the execution of his design he had several able coadjutors, among whom Richard Heber, M.P. for the University of Oxford; George Ellis, author of *Specimens of Ancient English Poetry*, one of Canning's assistants in *The Anti-Jacobin*; and the crabbed antiquary, Joseph Ritson, were his chief advisers in matters relating to archæology. On the poetical side he was assisted by two men of mark, John Leyden and James Hogg. The former (1775-1811) is specially memorable for his great attainments in philology, which placed him on a level with Sir William Jones, but he was not without a poetical turn of the same kind as that possessed by William Julius Mickle and exhibited by Scott himself in his early imitations of the ballad style. Leyden's best-known compositions are *The Court of Kuldar*, *Lord Soulis*, and *The Mermaid*. Like Scott he was an enthusiastic collector, and on one occasion walked between forty and fifty miles to write down a ballad from the dictation of an old peasant.

James Hogg, better known as the Ettrick Shepherd, was a man with a strong native genius for poetry. He was born at Ettrickhall in 1770, the son of Robert Hogg and Margaret Laidlaw, both members of families which on each side had pursued for several generations the occupation of shepherds. His father, having saved money, invested, soon after his marriage, in two farms with which he had at first some success; but in consequence of a great fall in the price of sheep he was reduced to bankruptcy before his son James had reached his sixth birthday. The boy was therefore removed very early from school, and, when only seven years of age, was sent

to keep the sheep of a neighbouring farmer. Having a turn for music he taught himself, in his fifteenth year, to play Scottish tunes on the violin; but he added little to his school learning, and he could not write. Between the ages of sixteen and seventeen he was made shepherd to a Mr. Laidlaw of Willenslee, who allowed him the use of his library, where, by reading Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* and Blind Harry's *Life and Adventures of Sir William Wallace*, he began to familiarise himself with the use of metre. He seems, however, to have made no metrical experiment of his own till 1796, when he patched up a poetical epistle to a student of divinity by borrowing lines from Dryden's Translation of Virgil and Blind Harry's metrical *Life of Bruce*. In 1800 he had so far improved his style as to be able to write his spirited war-song *Donald M'Donald*, which, being printed, soon became popular. He made Scott's acquaintance at Blackhouse, the farm of William Laidlaw, with whom he was on an intimate footing, and after the appearance of Volumes I. II. of the *Border Minstrelsy*, he gave Scott much assistance by copying out for the third volume, from his own mother's recital, in their cottage at Ettrick-hall, a number of old ballads of which the most noteworthy is *Auld Maitland*.

The first two volumes of *Border Minstrelsy* were published in 1802, and brought Scott as his share of the profits £78 : 10s. A second edition being demanded, he was encouraged to prepare a third volume of the work, in which he had intended to include, besides *Cadyow Castle*, —a ballad written in the early part of 1802, after a visit at Hamilton Palace in Lanarkshire,—the first draft of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, containing the story of *Gilpin Horner*—which had been recently suggested to him, as a subject, by Lady Dalkeith—together with "*Sir Tristrem*, a Metrical Romance by Thomas of Ercildoune, called the Rhymer, edited from an ancient MS. with an Introduction and Notes by Walter Scott, Esq." Neither of these latter, however, was contained in the third volume, published in May 1803. *Sir Tristrem* did not follow till

the 19th of March 1804: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, kept back to receive many modifications, appeared in the first week of January 1805.

The delay in the execution of Scott's literary designs was occasioned by his abounding energy in the affairs of practical life. Soon after his marriage he and his wife settled in a cottage at Lasswade on the Esk, about six miles from Edinburgh, a situation which he found very convenient both in connection with his functions as Quarter-master of the Edinburgh Light Horse (a body of Volunteers formed in 1797 when fears of invasion were prevalent), and also as a frequent contributor to *The Edinburgh Review*, which for some little time, after its foundation in 1802 had maintained so moderate an attitude in politics, as not to preclude the assistance of writers of the Tory persuasion. Unfortunately "the incessant drills and musters of Musselburgh and Portobello" proved an obstacle to the performance of similar duties requiring the presence of the Sheriff of Selkirkshire, and Lord Napier, Lord-Lieutenant of that county, pressed on Scott the propriety of resigning his connection with the Edinburgh Cavalry and removing his home to some spot within his shrieval jurisdiction. Scott, recognising the force of the Lord-Lieutenant's arguments, settled himself in 1804 at Ashestiel, a house on the southern bank of the Tweed, a few miles from Selkirk, in close neighbourhood with the estates of the Duke of Buccleuch. These changes of residence, combined with the punctual discharge of his military duties, throw light upon the gradual expansion of structure in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, as described by Lockhart:

> It is curious to trace the small beginnings and gradual development of his design. The lovely Countess of Dalkeith hears a wild rude legend of Border *diablerie*, and sportively asks him to make it the subject of a ballad. He had been already labouring in the elucidation of the "quaint Inglis" ascribed to an ancient seer and bard of the same district, and perhaps completed his own sequel, intending the whole to be included in the third volume of the *Minstrelsy*. He assents to Lady

Dalkeith's request, and casts about for some new variety of diction and rhyme, which might be adopted without impropriety in a closing strain for the same collection. Sir John Stoddart's casual recitation, a year or two before, of Coleridge's unpublished *Christabel* had fixed the music of that noble fragment in his memory; and it occurs to him that by throwing the story of Gilpin Horner into somewhat of a similar cadence he might produce such an echo of the later metrical romance as would serve to connect his *Conclusion* of the primitive *Sir Tristrem* with his imitations of the common popular ballad in the *Grey Brother* and *Eve of St. John.* A single scene of feudal festivity in the hall of Branksome, disturbed by some pranks of a nondescript goblin was probably all that he contemplated; but his accidental confinement in the midst of a volunteer camp gave him leisure to meditate his theme to the sound of the bugle; —and suddenly there flashes on him the idea of extending his simple outline so as to embrace a vivid panorama of that old Border life of war and tumult and all earnest passions with which his researches on the *Minstrelsy* had by degrees fed his imagination, until even the minutest feature had been taken home and realised with unconscious intenseness of sympathy; so that he had won for himself in the past another world hardly less complete or familiar than the present. Erskine or Cranstoun suggests that he would do well to divide the poem into Cantos, and prefix to each of them a motto explanatory of the action after the fashion of Spenser in *The Faery Queen.* He pauses for a moment — and the happiest conception of the framework of a picturesque narrative that ever occurred to any poet—one that Homer might have envied—the creation of the ancient harper, starts to life. By such steps did *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* grow out of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.*[1]

The success of the *Lay* was unexampled. Not only was it read with delight by thousands of the "unsophisticated" public, but it roused the enthusiasm of statesmen and scholars like Pitt, Fox, Ellis, and Frere. Scott felt that he could henceforth trust with some confidence to literature as a profession, and we find him at this time full of projects, including an edition of Dryden and a collection of the British Poets ancient and modern. He wrote the opening chapters of *Waverley*, contributed many articles to *The Edinburgh Review*; and

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xiii.

began *Marmion*, the copyright of which Constable, without having seen a line of it, secured for £1000. Nothing that Scott undertook was left in the world of dreams. When he found that there were difficulties in the way of his contemplated edition of the British Poets he abandoned it and concentrated all his energies on Dryden (the edition was published in 1808), and on his own imaginative designs. At the same time he entered into that partnership with James Ballantyne, the printer, which was the initial cause of his financial ruin. Nor did he neglect his duties as volunteer quarter-master and sheriff; and those who served with him in the Edinburgh regiment could recall the energy with which at exercise he would dash on horseback into the sea, in the intervals of the manœuvres, and afterwards recite some of the stanzas of *Marmion* with which he had been inspired. In 1806 he was made one of the Principal Clerks of the Supreme Court of Session, on an arrangement with Mr. Home, the then holder of the office, that he was not to receive the emoluments—worth £800 a year—till the latter died.

*Marmion* was published on the 23rd of February 1808, and was no less successful than *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. It was criticised with some severity by Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*, a proceeding which Scott accepted with his usual equanimity, but which heightened his long-felt dissatisfaction with the political conduct of the Whig organ, and led to the foundation in 1809 of *The Quarterly Review*. *Marmion* was also attacked by Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, mainly on account of the large sum which Scott was reported to have received for the poem. Scott took no notice of the matter at the time, but when in 1812 Byron, who admired him greatly, seized an opportunity of making his acquaintance through Murray, he took care, in a very characteristic letter, to place the financial arrangements made with Constable respecting *Marmion* in their true light.[1] Meantime *The Lady of the Lake* (the result of a

[1] Letter from Scott to Byron of July 3, 1812; Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xxiv.

visit to the Trossachs) was begun in 1809, and being completed before the end of that year, was published in May 1810. In spite of the anxieties of some of his friends, who feared that, by attempting a third metrical romance, he might injure his reputation, this work was perhaps even more popular than either of its predecessors, and Scott's fame as a poet reached its culminating point. The inspiring effect of his poetry on the general reader is admirably illustrated by an anecdote recorded in Lockhart's *Life*:

"I must not omit," says the biographer, "a circumstance which had reached Scott from another source, and which he always took a special pride in relating, namely that in the course of the day when *The Lady of the Lake* first reached Sir Adam Fergusson, he was posted with his company on a point of ground exposed to the enemy's artillery; somewhere no doubt on the lines of Torres Vedras. The men were ordered to lie prostrate on the ground; while they kept that attitude, the Captain, kneeling at their head read aloud the description of the battle in Canto VI., and the listening soldiers only interrupted him by a joyous huzza, whenever the French shot struck the bank close above them." [1]

*The Lady of the Lake* was first read by Fergusson in May 1811, and the letter in which he tells Scott of the delight it had given him, acknowledges also the receipt of *The Vision of Don Roderick*, which was published in July of that year. This latter poem had its origin partly in contemporary events, and partly in the advice, pressed upon Scott by Canning and Ellis, to attempt narrative composition in the more dignified metres consecrated by the practice of great English poets. The comparative stiffness of its rhythm makes it plain that the writer is not moving in his natural element; and Scott's own inclination prompted him to fresh experiments on the ground which he had already conquered. It would perhaps have been better—though such self-restraint would have been almost superhuman—if he had contented himself with the triumph of *The Lady of the Lake*. But he was anxious to celebrate Scotland's

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xxii.

greatest king, and in the summer of 1810 he took the opportunity of an invitation received from the Laird of Staffa to pay a visit to the Hebrides, where he studied the scenery of which he afterwards availed himself in *The Lord of the Isles*. He began the poem itself but, as he found it rather heavy in hand, he laid it aside, and, after writing *The Vision of Don Roderick*, turned his thoughts to *Rokeby*, resolving to cast into an imaginative form the ideas which had been suggested to him by the beautiful landscape of John Morritt's seat on the Tees in Yorkshire. He proceeded with this work fitfully, varying it by composing snatches of *The Bridal of Triermain*, a poem with which he intended to mystify the public, by encouraging the rumour that it was the production of his friend Erskine. *Rokeby* was published in December 1812. The reputation of the author of course secured for it a large sale, but it never attained the popularity of its predecessors, and the obvious mechanism of its composition exposed it to a certain amount of ridicule. Moore, in his *Epistle to Lady Corke*, alludes to it with a touch of felicitous satire:

> Should you feel any touch of *poetical* glow,
> We've a scheme to suggest—Mr. Scott, you must know,
> (Who, we're sorry to say it, now works for the *Row*),
> Having quitted the Borders to seek new renown,
> Is coming by long quarto stages to town,
> And beginning with Rokeby (the job's sure to pay),
> Means to do all the gentlemen's seats on the way.
> Now the scheme is, though none of our hackneys can beat him,
> To start a new poet through Highgate to meet him;
> Who by means of quick proofs—no revises—long coaches—
> May do a few villas before Scott approaches;
> Indeed if our Pegasus be not curst shabby,
> He'll reach, without foundering, at least Woburn Abbey.

*The Bridal of Triermain* followed hard on the heels of *Rokeby*, and, till the real authorship was disclosed by Erskine, was generally accepted as a successful imitation by the latter of Scott's style. About the same time Scott began *Harold the Dauntless*, of which at one time he seems to have had a good opinion, but of which, after

its publication in 1817, when he was in the full tide of prose composition, he writes: "I thought once I should have made it something clever, but it turned vapid on my imagination; and I finished it at last with hurry and impatience."

In 1812 he had removed to Abbotsford, a farm on the Tweed which he had bought in 1811, as soon as his lease of Ashestiel came to an end, part of the purchase money being obtained on security of the then unwritten *Rokeby*. In 1813 the affairs of the Ballantynes, neither of whom had any capacity for business, involved Scott in much embarrassment, and he resolved to dissolve the partnership into which he had entered and to make a new arrangement with Constable, who agreed to take over the publishing stock of the Ballantyne firm. To complete the purchase of Abbotsford Scott required £4000, and could only raise this either by selling his interest in the copyright of his works, or by obtaining a guarantee of credit from some man of substance. In this difficulty he applied to the Duke of Buccleuch, and received from him an assurance of readiness to give the required security. At the same time he was flattered by the expressed wish of the Prince Regent that he should fill the Laureateship rendered vacant by the death of Pye, but as he was not anxious to undertake this duty, he procured through Croker that the offer should be made to Southey, by whom it was accepted.

He now resumed his work on *The Lord of the Isles*, and, after completing a canto of the poem to his own satisfaction, accepted Constable's offer of fifteen hundred guineas for half the copyright. Having finished in 1814 the edition of Swift's works, containing the *Life*, which he had undertaken for Constable in 1808, he went on a voyage to the Orkney and Shetland Islands, ending his tour with a second visit to the Hebrides, for the purpose of studying the scenery. "My principal employment for the autumn," he writes to a friend on his return, "will be reducing the knowledge I have acquired of the localities of the islands into scenery and stage-

room for *The Lord of the Isles*, of which renowned romance I think I have repeated some portions to you. It was older born than Rokeby, though it gave place to it in publishing." The poem, completed with extraordinary rapidity, was published on the 18th of January 1815; the sale was large, but unaccompanied by any of the enthusiasm with which the public had received the first three romances; and Scott subsequently tried to account for the diminished popularity of his later poetical works.[1] The two principal causes he assigns are the number of his own imitators and the appearance of Byron; but, with the natural self-esteem of an author, he passes lightly over the main consideration, namely the instinctive perception of the public that the vein of poetic novelty had been exhausted. His disappointment, however, was much lightened by the consciousness that he had discovered a region of almost unexplored imaginative wealth. *Waverley* had been published anonymously in July 1814, and had met with prodigious success, so that when Ballantyne felt himself obliged to announce to Scott the comparative failure of *The Lord of the Isles*, the latter, says Lockhart, replied "with perfect cheerfulness: 'Well, well, James so be it—but you know we must not droop, for we can't afford to give over. Since one line has failed we must just stick to something else': and so he dismissed me, and resumed his novel."[2]

Throughout the period in which he pursued his scheme of metrical romance Scott never ceased to interest himself in the fortunes of his disciple, Hogg, who, while pushing into the path first opened by his patron, was inclined to think he had himself discovered a more excellent way. Before the appearance of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* he had published a few ballads, which had obtained for him some reputation in the Forest of Ettrick; but in Edinburgh these attracted but little notice. When the third volume of the *Minstrelsy* containing Scott's own ballads was published, "immediately," says Hogg, "I chose a number of traditional facts, and set about

[1] Preface to *Rokeby*, 1830. [2] *Life of Scott*, chap. xxxiv.

imitating the manner of the ancients myself." These imitations he sent to Scott who received them with generous praise, and after inviting their author to his house, continued to treat him on a footing of familiar intimacy. Encouraged by his praise, the Shepherd resolved to make another experiment on the public taste. Through Scott's influence with Constable he produced in 1807 his collection of ballads called *The Mountain Bard*, which obtained for him considerable reputation, and Scott exerted himself strenuously to promote his interest. He had at first thought of making Hogg his shepherd at Ashestiel, but the latter was always haunted by two great objects of ambition, to win himself a name in literature, and to make enough money by his literary work to raise himself from the position of shepherd to that of farmer. The former object he attained, but in the latter, despite the endeavours of Scott and other friends, his efforts were for a long time attended by constant ill-luck. He had bought in 1804 a farm in the island of Harris, but lost all the money he had saved during his early service as a shepherd, in an unsuccessful attempt to prove his title to his new possession. By the profits of his *Mountain Bard* he was in a position to make a fresh start, but, as he says of himself:

> Being now master of nearly £300, I went perfectly mad. I first took one pasture farm, at exactly one half more than it was worth, having been cheated into it by a great rascal, who meant to rob me of all I had, and which, in the course of one year, he effected by dint of law. But in the meantime, having taken another extensive farm, I found myself fairly involved in business far above my capital. It would have required at least one thousand pounds for every one hundred pounds that I possessed, to have managed all I had taken in hand; so I got every day out of one strait and confusion into a worse. I blundered and struggled on for three years between these two places, giving up all thoughts of poetry and literature of any kind.[1]

In 1810 he again tried his literary fortune with a collection of songs, pathetic, humorous, amorous, and

[1] Hogg's *Autobiography*, Centenary Edition of Works, p. 446.

national, published under the title of *The Forest Minstrel.* This work seemed obviously to challenge comparison with Burns; and, perhaps in consequence, proved entirely unsuccessful. Scott did what he could for Hogg by recommending his book to the notice of Lady Dalkeith, but in his letter to her he observed with unquestionable justice:

> I fear your ladyship will find but little amusement in it; for the poor fellow has just talent sufficient to spoil him for his own trade, without having enough to support him by literature.[1]

The Countess, in acknowledgment of the dedication to herself, sent Hogg through Scott a hundred guineas, beyond which present *The Forest Minstrel* seems to have brought the author no profit. But in 1813 Hogg added greatly to his reputation by his *Queen's Wake*, which hit the public taste and obtained for him, among other marks of appreciation, the warm praise of Byron. Writing to the latter, Scott says:

> The author of the *Queen's Wake* will be delighted with your approbation. He is a wonderful creature for his opportunities, which were far inferior to those of the generality of Scottish peasants. Burns for instance (not that their extent of talents is to be compared for an instant) had an education not much worse than the sons of many gentlemen in Scotland. But poor Hogg could literally neither read nor write till a very late period of his life, and when he first distinguished himself by his poetical talent could neither spell nor write grammar. When I first knew him, he used to send me his poetry, and was both indignant and horrified when I pointed out to him parallel passages in authors whom he had never read, but whom all the world would have sworn he had copied.[2]

Even this literary success ended in financial failure, and Hogg's agricultural ambition was only realised in 1817, when, through Scott's influence with the Duchess of Buccleuch, the Shepherd, at his own request, was accepted as tenant in the farm of Altrive on the lake of that name in the braes of Yarrow. Scott, who had

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xxiii. [2] *Ibid.* chap. xxvi.

exerted himself to get up a subscription for a new *edition de luxe* of the *Queen's Wake*, so as to enable Hogg to stock the farm, says in a letter to Lord Montagu:

> There is an old saying of the seamen's, "every man is not born to be a boatswain," and I think I have heard of men born under a sixpenny planet, and doomed never to be worth a groat. I fear something of this vile sixpenny influence had gleamed in at the cottage window when poor Hogg first came squeaking into the world. All that he made by his original book he ventured on a flock of sheep to drive into the Highlands to a farm he had taken there, but of which he could not get possession, so that all the stock was ruined and sold to disadvantage. Then he tried another farm, which proved too dear so that he fairly broke upon it. Then put forth divers publications which had little sale—and brought him accordingly few pence, though some praise. Then came this *Queen's Wake*, by which he might and ought to have made from £100 to £200—for there were, I think, three editions—when lo! his bookseller turned bankrupt, and paid him never a penny.[1]

Scott's fears of the "vile sixpenny influence" were prophetic. Hogg, indeed, having now secured a footing in literature, succeeded in making a good deal of money by his pen: at the same time his vanity and want of tact involved him in many difficulties, of which the publication of the famous "Chaldee Manuscript" in *Blackwood's Magazine* was only a single example. He also married a lady of a rank above his own, and received with her a portion of £1000. But these successes elated him over-much, and he was tempted to quit the small farm of Altrive, where he had contrived to support his old parents in moderate comfort, for the larger Mount-Benger, on which he sunk all his capital without getting any return for it. When his nine-years' lease expired, he found himself again penniless, and returned with his wife and children to his Altrive farm, which he was still allowed by the Duke of Buccleuch to hold free of rent. It should be added that, in the midst of his misfortunes, he never lost the spirit of buoyant cheerfulness which

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xxxviii.

had sustained him from his earliest years. None of his poetical compositions after *The Queen's Wake* was successful in pleasing the public taste; and though he was more successful in prose with his *Altrive Tales* (1832) and *Montrose Tales* (1834), the bankruptcy of his publisher, Cochrane, deprived him of the profit these works would otherwise have brought him. He died on the 31st November 1835, and was buried in the churchyard of Ettrick.

In considering the character of the metrical romantic movement, initiated by Scott, it would be idle to judge it by a purely external standard. On the first appearance of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Jeffrey, puzzled by the novel features of the poem, nevertheless attempted to subject them to the canons he had recently been endeavouring to formulate in *The Edinburgh Review*.

"Our readers," says the New-Whig critic, "will easily perceive, that, however well calculated it may be for the introduction of picturesque imagery, or the display of extraordinary incidents, it has but little pretension to the praise of a regular or coherent narrative. The magic of the lady, the midnight visit to Melrose, and the mighty book of the enchanter, which occupy nearly one-third of the whole poem, and engross the attention of the reader for a long time after the commencement of the narrative, are of no use whatever in the subsequent development of the fable, and do not contribute either to the production or explanation of the incidents that follow."[1]

*Marmion*, which was guilty of the unpardonable sin of continuing to defy the new "Rules," fared even worse:

"Though," says Jeffrey, "we think this last romance of Mr. Scott's about as good as the former, and allow that it affords great indications of poetical talent, we must remind our readers that we never entertained much partiality for this sort of composition, and ventured on a former occasion to express our regret that an author endowed with such talents should consume them in imitations of obsolete extravagances, and the representation of manners and sentiments, in which none of his readers can be

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, April 1805.

supposed to take much interest except the few who can judge of their accuracy." [1]

The shrewdness, and, as far as they went, the justice of Jeffrey's strictures on *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, were undeniable. But the delight with which the public received this poem and *Marmion* must have caused him, in spite of his self-sufficiency, to suspect that his purely negative method of criticism had scarcely enabled him to give an adequate appreciation of the new departure in taste, and when *The Lady of the Lake* presented itself for judgment, he showed himself rather more sympathetic.

"There is nothing," he says, "cold, creeping, or feeble in all Mr. Scott's poetry; no laborious littleness or puling classical affectation. He has his failings, indeed, like other people, but he always attempts vigorously, and never fails in his immediate object, without accomplishing far beyond the reach of an ordinary writer. Even when he wanders from the paths of pure taste, he leaves behind him the footsteps of a powerful genius, and moulds the most humble of his materials into a form worthy of a nobler substance. Allied to this inherent vigour and animation, and in a great degree derived from it, is that air of facility and freedom which adds so peculiar a grace to most of Mr. Scott's compositions. He seems, indeed, never to think either of himself or his reader, but to be completely identified and lost in the personages with whom he is occupied; and the attention of the reader is consequently either transferred, unbroken, to their adventures, or if it glance back for a moment to the author, it is only to think how much more might be done by putting forth that strength at full which has, without effort, accomplished so many wonders." [2]

Had Jeffrey been less absorbed in his Whig exclusiveness, he must have seen, first, that the characteristics of Scott's genius, which he noted with such admirable precision, could not be brought within the scope of his stereotyped system of criticism, and, next, that the unexampled popularity of the new style of poetry was in itself a phenomenon requiring separate attention. The tendencies of popular enthusiasm might no doubt misdirect the genius of the poet; but it was no less certain that so vast a volume of instinctive feeling could never have proceeded from a mere caprice of fashion, but must

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, April 1808. [2] *Ibid.* August 1810.

have somewhere a source deep in nature ; and that, before an accurate judgment could be passed on the form of the poet's art, it was necessary to account for the great movement of the public taste.

The success of Scott's metrical romances was in fact due to this, that he was the first to discover a natural poetic form for the expression of mediæval tendencies which, though they had been submerged since the Revolution of 1688 by the inflowing tides of the Renaissance, formed an integral part of the historic life and imagination of the English people. The last volume of this History contained a sketch of the early stages of the Romantic revival in English poetry.[1] I showed that the movement had its fountain-head in a certain reaction of the imagination against the regularity of civil order, and in a desire to restore the liberty and simplicity of an earlier stage of social life. This feeling welled upwards into light through a number of poetical and literary springs. It showed itself first in the revival of lyrical composition by Joseph Warton, Gray, and Collins. The stream thus formed was enlarged by various affluents. Thomas Warton contributed to the change of taste by his commentaries on *The Faery Queene* and Milton's early poems, as well as by his *History of English Poetry*. Bishop Percy popularised the idea of the Ballad by his *Reliques of Early English Poetry*. Macpherson and Chatterton strove to imitate the character of Ossianic sentiment or the idiom of monkish manuscripts. A host of explorers burst into "the silent sea" of Scandinavian mythology. The aim of all these writers was simply to satisfy the craving of the public imagination for novelty ; none of them showed any desire to undermine the foundations of social order.

But the progress of events in the last quarter of the eighteenth century inflamed the passions of men ; and just as the outbreak of the French Revolution produced a rupture of the Whig party in politics, so did it operate to break up the course of the Romantic movement in the region of imagination. One section of writers, as we have

[1] Vol. V. chap. xii.

seen, allied themselves with the Revolution on its intellectual side, and adopted its ideas of sentiment and morality. Their chief aim was the emancipation of thought and taste from all traditional restrictions. In a crude and vulgar form the romantic tendency had already been foreshadowed by the revived Petrarchism of the Della Cruscan school of poetry, but it found a larger channel of expression in the fictions of the numerous men of letters who fell under the influence of Rousseau, and followed the lead of William Godwin in his speculations on Political Justice.

In the imagination of society at large, however, the influence of the French Revolution was chiefly manifested by the impulse it gave to ideas of action and adventure. If the source of inspiration for the philosophers of the Romantic school was French, Germany provided new materials for the dramatist and the lyrical poet. A certain amount of popularity was obtained on the stage by plays constructed after the fashion of Schiller's *Robbers* and Kotzebue's *Stranger*; but the poems which fell in most congenially with the new conditions of English taste were the wild ballads of Bürger. Matthew Lewis was the first to introduce his countrymen to the new legendary school of German lyrical composition, which seems itself to have been set in motion by the fame of Bishop Percy's *Reliques*; and imagination having been once infected with a taste for spectres, demons, and other mediæval superstitions, the German epidemic soon became universal. As Scott's example shows, the new impulse was felt by men whose conservative instincts in all matters of Church and State were deeply rooted, and whose taste was grounded on long study of the English classical style inaugurated by the Revolution of 1688: the author of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* made his first modest appearance before the public as a translator of German ballads and a contributor to Lewis' *Tales of Wonder*.

But the invention of Scott was far too large and representative to restrict itself for long to so limited a sphere. In his temperament were happily blended all the

conflicting energies by which the action of his age and nation was inspired. Whig by paternal connection and training, he was Tory by ancestral tradition and personal inclination, Jacobite by imagination and sentiment. While his education had made him historian, antiquary, and lawyer, his genius transmuted all the knowledge gained in these various departments into poetry. As a poet, he united Wordsworth's love of wild nature with Byron's passion for energetic action, and to Campbell's martial patriotism he added an intense enthusiasm for the soil of his country, which recalls Virgil's praises of Italy in the Second Georgic.

> O Caledonia! stern and wild,
> Meet nurse for a poetic child!
> Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
> Land of the mountain and the flood,
> Land of my sires! what mortal hand
> Can e'er untie the filial band
> That knits me to thy rugged strand!
> Still, as I view each well-known scene,
> Think what is now, and what hath been,
> Seems as, to me, of all bereft,
> Sole friends thy woods and streams were left;
> And thus I love them better still,
> Even in extremity of ill.
> By Yarrow's streams still let me stray,
> Though none should guide my feeble way;
> Still feel the breeze down Ettrick break,
> Although it chill my withered cheek,
> Still lay my head by Teviot Stone,
> Though there, forgotten and alone,
> The Bard may draw his parting groan.[1]

The personal passion which animates all Scott's best poetry has this peculiarity, that it is not conceived like the lyrics of most of his contemporaries in an egotistic but in a social and patriotic spirit. It is easy to see that it would have been impossible to express such an overmastering feeling in a shape which—to quote Jeffrey's phrase—would entitle it "to the praise of a regular or coherent narrative." The form that Scott found for his inspirations was in fact the result of a slow, almost an accidental,

[1] *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Canto vi. 2.

development, adapting itself instinctively to the windings of the public taste. Even in his early stage of ballad-imitation we find a mood quite different from that of the first pioneers of romantic revival like Hamilton of Bangour:[1] his imitations show no trace of any effort to sustain the archaic effect of the old ballad style: he is interested in the action and incident of the story, and seeks to tell it in the way which he feels will appeal most strongly to a modern audience. Let the reader compare, for example, the first (or ancient) and the third (or modern) parts of *Thomas the Rhymer*, and he will note the germs and trace the genesis of the style which at a later date culminated in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The ancient part of the poem is characterised by the genuine *naïveté* of a rude minstrel singing to an assembly of peasants; the modern, professing to be a reproduction of the tale of Tristram and Iseult, as told by Thomas the Rhymer himself to knights and ladies, really reflects the feelings of a latter-day audience, sophisticated and sentimental, whose imaginations are tinctured indeed by a literary acquaintance with Percy's *Reliques*, but require a mediæval love-story to be presented to them in the full dress of the eighteenth-century assembly and ball-room. Scott's supplement contains a sprinkling of old words; the names of places, familiar and dear to the poet, are woven into the narrative, in a manner anticipating *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*; a *précis* is given of the story of Tristram and Iseult; but how little he cared to preserve a superficial appearance of antiquity in his imitation may be judged by the stanzas in which True Thomas's style of narrative is described:

Through many a maze the winning song
In changeful passion led,
Till bent at length the listening throng
O'er Tristrem's dying bed.

His ancient wounds their scars expand,
With agony his heart is wrung:
'O where is Isolde's lilye hand,
And where her soothing tongue?

[1] See vol. v. pp. 410-11.

She comes! she comes! like flash of flame
Can lover's footsteps fly:
She comes! she comes!—she only came
To see her Tristrem die.

She saw him die; her latest sigh
Joined in a kiss his parting breath;
The gentlest pair that Britain bare,
United are in death.

On the other hand, Thomas the Rhymer's fate, which is supposed to be recorded by a modern minstrel, is thus narrated:

Then forth they rushed: by Leader's tide
A selcouth sight they see—
A hart and hind pace side by side
As white as snow on Fairnalie.
. . . . .
To Learmont's tower a message sped,
As fast as page might run;
And Thomas started from his bed,
And soon his clothes did on.

First he woxe pale, and then woxe red;
Never a word he spake but three:—
"My sand is run; my thread is spun;
This sign regardeth me."

Finding that this mixture of the ancient style with the modern was highly acceptable to the public taste, Scott gradually extended his practice in the manner described by Lockhart and illustrated in the structure of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* Into the person of the Minstrel he projected his own feelings; and the conscious outbursts of sentiment with which the Minstrel opens each canto of his narrative have nothing in common with the rude simplicity of the old Ballad style. What ancient bard would have written?

Breathes there a man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
"This is my own, my native land!"
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
As home his footsteps he hath turned
From wandering on a foreign strand!

If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no Minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.[1]

The harp may be that of the aged Minstrel who is supposed to have played before

King Charles the Good
When he kept court in Holyrood;

but the voice is the voice of the quarter-master of the Edinburgh Light Horse, raised in 1797 to defend the country against the invasion of the French; the style is that of the author of the vigorous war-song, "To horse! to horse! the standard flies," etc.

The poetic merit of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* lies in its descriptions—descriptions either of scenery, such as William of Deloraine saw in his ride through Teviotdale, the neighbourhood of Melrose Abbey, and the various landscapes of the river Ettrick on which the poet's imagination had dwelt from his boyhood; or of the times of chivalry, which his reading in ancient deeds and chronicles had made as familiar to him as contemporary manners. It was inevitable that a story composed in the piecemeal method of *The Lay* should want unity and consistency of action. As Jeffrey says, the different romantic episodes on which the poet expatiates "are of no use whatever in the subsequent development of the fable"; and the Whig reviewer showed much sagacity in detecting the want of connection in the original design between the story of Gilpin Horner and the other portions of the poem.

"The story of Gilpin Horner," he objects, "was never believed out of the village where he is said to have made his appearance, and has no claim upon the credulity of those who

[1] *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Canto ii. 1.

were not originally of his acquaintance. There is nothing at all interesting or elegant in the scenes of which he is the hero; and in reading those passages we really could not help suspecting that they did not stand in the romance which the aged Minstrel recalled to the royal Charles and his mighty earls, but were inserted afterwards to suit the taste of the cottagers, among whom he begged his bread on the Border."[1]

Scott felt the justice of Jeffrey's criticism, and having now formed a new style of epic narrative, sufficiently grounded in nature to hold the interest of the public, he resolved in his next romantic experiment to bring its original features into closer conformity with the requirements of art. The structure of *Marmion* is quite different from that of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The essential materials of both poems are indeed the same. *Marmion*, like *The Lay*, depends for much of its effect upon descriptions of scenery and chivalrous manners; we at once detect in the narrative the author's recollections of his own excursions in Northumberland and in the country districts between Berwick and Edinburgh; the multiformity of his antiquarian knowledge is displayed in the Notes to the Cantos describing the Castle of Norham and the Court of King James. But these picturesque details are now organised round a plot resembling in all its characteristic features the plan of romance adopted in Mrs. Radcliffe's novels. The crimes of Marmion and the adventures of Ralph de Wilton recall the artifices employed by the authoress of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and other contemporary romance-writers to engross the attention of their readers. By these means *Marmion* attains more unity of action than *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. But the increased interest of the narrative entails a certain sacrifice of verisimilitude in the poem as a whole. It is felt that the poet has not been entirely successful in blending the probabilities of fiction with the truth of history. William of Deloraine is an ideal representative of Border warfare, no less probable than picturesque; but Marmion, the forger of deeds, the

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, April 1805.

traitor to love, "not quite a felon, yet but half a knight," as Byron justly calls him, is neither a worthy specimen of the feudal age nor a hero suitable to the atmosphere of poetry. The merits of the poem still lie in its detached episodes—in the portraits of the devil-may-care Captain of Norham Castle and Archibald Bell-the-Cat, or in the splendid description of the Battle of Flodden. Scott's poetical style reaches its highest point in his description of the flank march by which Surrey turned the position of the Scots before the commencement of the battle.

Even so it was. From Flodden ridge
The Scots beheld the English host
Leave Barmore-wood, their evening post,
And heedful watched them as they crossed
The Till by Twisel Bridge.
High sight it is, and haughty, while
They dive into the deep defile;
Beneath the caverned cliff they fall,
Beneath the castle's airy wall.
By rock, by oak, by hawthorn-tree,
Troop after troop are disappearing;
Troop after troop their banners rearing,
Upon the eastern bank you see.
Still pouring down the rocky den,
Where flows the sullen Till,
And rising from the dim-wood glen,
Standards on standards, men on men,
In slow succession still,
And, sweeping o'er the Gothic arch,
And pressing on, in ceaseless march,
To gain the opposing hill.
That morn to many a trumpet clang,
Twisel! thy rock's deep echo rang;
And many a chief of birth and rank,
Saint Helen! at thy fountain drank.
Thy hawthorn glade, which now we see
In spring-tide bloom so lavishly,
Had then from many an axe its doom,
To give the marching columns room.

And why stands Scotland idly now,
Dark Flodden! on thy airy brow,
Since England gains the pass the while,
And struggles through the deep defile?

What checks the fiery soul of James?
Why sits that champion of the dames
Inactive on his steed,
And sees, between him and his land,
Between him and Tweed's southern strand,
His host Lord Surrey lead?
What 'vails the vain knight-errant's brand?—
O Douglas for thy leading wand!
Fierce Randolph for thy speed!
O for one hour of Wallace wight,
Or well-skilled Bruce, to rule the fight,
And cry "Saint Andrew and our right!"
Another sight had seen that morn,
From Fate's dark book a leaf been torn,
And Flodden had been Bannockbourne!—
The precious hour has passed in vain,
And England's host has gained the plain;
Wheeling their march, and circling still,
Around the base of Flodden hill.[1]

A third experiment enabled Scott to overcome the defects in the structure of his narrative style due to its fortuitous development. *The Lady of the Lake* has its groundwork in the same motives that inspired *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion*—a passionate love of romantic scenery and an imaginative sympathy with ancient and primitive manners; but it is not disfigured either by the incoherence of form which is felt to be a drawback in the first of Scott's romances, or by the inconsistency between the fiction and the history which is a blot on the second. Action and character in *The Lady of the Lake* are beautifully blended with the description of the district in which the incidents of the story are supposed to take place.

"This poem," says Scott, "the action of which lay among scenes so beautiful, and so deeply imprinted on my recollection, was a labour of love, and it was no less so to recall the manners and incidents introduced. The frequent custom of James IV., and particularly of James V., to walk through their kingdom in disguise, afforded me the hint of an incident which never fails to be interesting, if managed with the slightest address or dexterity."[2]

[1] *Marmion*, Canto vi. 19, 20.
[2] Preface to *Lady of the Lake*, Edition of *Poetical Works*, 1830.

"Address and dexterity" are exhibited throughout this poem in their finest form. The complication and explication of the plot, disguise and recognition (*ἀναγνώρισις*), all the features, in fact, characteristic of romance from its first beginnings in the Greek novel, are managed with perfect propriety; without exception, the personages of the tale are interesting and play their parts in the way that probability requires; and an air of charming grace and vivacity animates each description, up to the admirable *dénouement*:

> Within 'twas brilliant all and light,
> A thronging scene of figures bright;
> It glowed on Ellen's dazzled sight,
> As when the setting sun has given
> Ten thousand hues to summer even,
> And from their tissue fancy frames
> Aerial knights and fairy dames.
> Still by Fitz-James her footing staid;
> A few faint steps she forward made,
> Then slow her drooping head she raised,
> And fearful round the presence gazed
> For him she sought, who owned this state,
> The dreaded prince whose will was fate.
> She gazed on many a princely port,
> Might well have ruled a royal court;
> On many a splendid garb she gazed,
> Then turned bewildered and amazed,
> For all stood bare; and, in the room,
> Fitz-James alone wore cap and plume.
> To him each lady's look was lent;
> On him each courtier's eye was bent;
> Midst furs and silks, and jewels sheen,
> He stood, in simple Lincoln green,
> The centre of the glittering ring,—
> And Snowdoun's Knight is Scotland's King. [1]

A triumph to which the happiness of the subject, the genius of the poet, and the taste of the public all contributed, could hardly be repeated. The number of themes suitable for treatment in the new romantic manner was limited. Even in *The Lady of the Lake* the poetry is seen to spring rather out of the skill with which the writer handles his materials than from the matter

[1] *Lady of the Lake*, Canto vi. 26.

itself. Scott had assumed the spontaneous air of the ancient bard; but in reality he showed himself the brilliant successor of polished *trouvères*, Chaucer, Boccaccio, Ariosto; and however he might enliven his narrative manner with simplicities of diction borrowed from the ballad, he knew well that the artificial revival of the long-decayed oral minstrelsy would fail in its effect so soon as it ceased to be a novelty. In *Rokeby* he applied his sophisticated style to an uncongenial subject, and the public, without understanding the cause, instinctively felt that the poetical propriety of the new minstrelsy had vanished. The poet, himself with a judicious respect for the unconscious judgments of his readers, began to examine critically the foundations of his own metrical manner. He asked himself whether there was any fundamental reason why he should not apply to romantic composition in prose the principles which had proved so popular in verse; perceiving that if this way were open to him, he would be in possession of an almost unlimited supply of subjects in place of the mine which he felt to be nearly exhausted. His meditations encouraged him to resume the narrative of *Waverley*, which he had laid aside during the inspired period of his "Minstrelsy"; and the delight with which that romance was hailed by the public, compared with the comparatively cold reception of *The Lord of the Isles*, confirmed him in his determination henceforth to exchange the methods of the poet for those of the novelist.

Had Scott's own sound judgment not discovered to him the artificiality of life in the revived "Minstrelsy," he might have learned the lesson from the literary experience of his disciple, James Hogg. The Ettrick Shepherd was a poet of extraordinary gifts. That a man who at the age of eighteen could barely read, and could not write, should within a few years have acquired such a mastery over the art of versification as to produce the admirable war-song *Donald M'Donald*, is even in itself a less remarkable fact than that the same man should soon afterwards have felt himself capable of editing a weekly newspaper, and have persuaded men of sense and talent to co-operate

with him in his adventure. Nature had endowed him with a fine and graceful fancy, and with abundance of comic humour, but not with critical judgment, and fortune had deprived him of the education required to turn his genius towards noble objects. Possessing in exceptional measure the faculty of poetic imitation, he had produced, in his pastoral solitude, an abundance of verse, which was mainly an echo of what he had read; and he was intoxicated with the praises with which his compositions were received by a rustic audience. When Scott produced his imitations of Border Minstrelsy, Hogg, perceiving that their manner was not genuinely antique, showed that he could himself construct with great facility ballads bearing superficially a closer resemblance to the style of the Border singers. The praise that Scott, with his usual generosity, bestowed upon compositions like *Gilmanscleuch* encouraged Hogg to publish his collection of tales, entitled *The Mountain Bard;* and the considerable popularity which this volume obtained inspired him with the ambition to make a second venture on the public favour in *The Forest Minstrel.* Clever as were his imitations of Burns's songs in the Scottish vernacular, they showed none of the original power of thought that distinguished the author of *Tam o' Shanter* and *The Twa Dogs*, and consequently excited no popular enthusiasm.

Returning to the paths of minstrelsy, Hogg published in 1813 *The Queen's Wake*, the work on which his reputation chiefly depends, and which, appearing while the taste for metrical romance still prevailed, was warmly received by the Edinburgh public. Like *The Mountain Bard*, the volume was composed of a number of separate tales, already written by Hogg, but a character of unity was given to it by the setting which, in obvious imitation of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, made it appear that these tales were monuments of a competition of ancient Bards who sang before Mary Queen of Scots on her first landing in her kingdom. The Shepherd introduces a Bard, representing himself, as one of the candidates, whose romance, though it does not succeed in gaining the first

prize, obtains from the Queen "a harp of old renown," which, as she says,

> Will make the elves of eve
> Their dwelling in the moonbeam leave,
> And ope thine eyes by haunted tree
> Their glittering tiny forms to see.
> The flitting shades that woo the glen
> 'Twill shape to forms of living men,—
> To forms on earth no more you see,
> Who once were loved, and aye will be;
> And holiest converse you may prove
> Of things below and things above.

In these verses—evidently intended to describe the character of his own "minstrelsy"—the poet indicates the qualities which he considers to be the only genuine characteristic of the Scottish Muse; and to many modern readers the most interesting part of *The Queen's Wake* will be the critical appreciations of the different poets who are supposed to have attempted to play on Queen Mary's harp. Hogg briefly characterises the different styles of Hamilton of Bangour, Allan Ramsay, Langhorne, Logan, and Leyden; but he dwells at length on the minstrelsy of Scott:

> The day arrived—blest be the day,
> Walter the Abbot came that way!—
> The sacred relic met his view—
> Ah! well the pledge of Heaven he knew!
> He screwed the chords, he tried a strain;
> 'Twas wild—he tuned and tried again,
> Then poured the numbers bold and free,
> The ancient magic melody.
>
> The land was charmed to list his lays;
> It knew the harp of ancient days.
> The Border chiefs, that long had been
> In sepulchres unhearsed and green,
> Passed from their mouldy vaults away
> In armour red and stern array,
> And by their moonlight halls were seen,
> In visor, helm, and habergeon.
> Even fairies sought our land again,
> So powerful was the magic strain.

Blest be his generous heart for aye!
He told me where the relic lay;
Pointed my way with ready will,
Afar on Ettrick's wildest hill;
Watched my first notes with curious eye,
And wondered at my minstrelsy:
He little weened a parent's tongue
Such strains had o'er my cradle sung.

O could the bard I loved so long
Reprove my fond aspiring song?
Or could his tongue of candour say,
That I should throw my harp away?
Just when her notes began with skill
To sound beneath the southern hill,
And twine around my bosom's core,
How could we part for evermore?
'Twas kindness all,—I cannot blame,—
For bootless is the minstrel flame;
But sure a bard might well have known
Another feelings by his own.

Of change enamoured,—woe the while!—
He left our mountains, left the isle;
And far to other kingdoms bore
The Caledonian harp of yore;
But, to the hand that framed her true,
Only by force one strain she threw.
That harp he never more shall see,
Unless 'mong Scotland's hills *with me.*

Not recognising that the revival of metrical romance was in reality a *tour de force*, Hogg continued to plod along the path which Scott had abandoned, believing, in his irrepressible egotism, that he was the genuine and the last survivor of the ancient minstrels. After *The Queen's Wake* he produced three long romances, *Mador of the Moor*, *The Pilgrims of the Sun*, and *Queen Hynde*. The subjects of these were indeed all derived from a Scottish source: all of them displayed considerable power of abstract fancy, as well as the literary talent which is the most astonishing feature in Hogg's poetical genius. But the two former would never have been conceived, if they had not been preceded by the work of original inventors. *Mador of the Moor* is written in the Spenserian stanza, a difficult metre, which Hogg,

who was attempting it for the first time, handles with surprising skill, but which is quite unsuitable as the vehicle of a story obviously copied from *The Lady of the Lake*. In *The Pilgrims of the Sun*, an equally unsuccessful attempt is made to express ideas suggested by Shelley's *Queen Mab*, in the primitive style of metrical romance. *Queen Hynde*, as a romance, commits the fatal error of endeavouring to endow with modern human interest a tale of times which is without any records except those of the poet's fancy. None of these compositions show any power of creating an illusion of probability. The Shepherd's literary ambition had in fact led him into a region of sophisticated art which his want of education, and his total ignorance of the manners of society, prevented him from cultivating to advantage.

So long as he confines himself to a range of poetry in which he can move unembarrassed by social conventions, Hogg's inspiration is unmistakable. His Jacobite songs and open-air lyrics are racy of the soil, and breathe a music which is all their own, as the opening stanza of *Bonnie Prince Charlie:*

> Cam ye by Athol, lad wi' the philabeg,
> Down by the Tummel, or banks o' the Garry;
> Saw ye our lads, wi' their bonnets and white cockades,
> Leaving their mountains to follow Prince Charlie?
>
> Follow thee! follow thee! wha wadna follow thee?
> Lang hast thou loved and trusted us fairly:
> Charlie, Charlie, wha wadna follow thee,
> King o' the Highland hearts, bonnie Prince Charlie?

There is pleasing melody in *The Skylark*:

> Bird of the wilderness,
> Blithesome and cumberless,
> Sweet be thy matin o'er moorland and lea!
> Emblem of happiness,
> Blest is thy dwelling-place—
> Oh to abide in the desert with thee!
> Wild is thy lay and loud,
> Far in the downy cloud,

Love gives it energy, love gave it birth.
Where on thy dewy wing,
Where art thou journeying?
Thy lay is in heaven, thy love is on earth.

Again, when he lights on a subject in which he can combine his genuine comic humour with his admirable faculty of imitation, he often produces delightful results. Nowhere is his imitative gift more happily exercised than in his *Poetic Mirror*, where he copies the different metrical manners of Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Wilson. The mixture of didactic loftiness and prosaic diction in the following imitation of Wordsworth shows how completely Hogg could sink his own egotism in imaginative sympathy with the mannerism of another:

Something in his voice,
While thus he spake of simplest articles
Of household use, yet sunk upon my soul,
Like distant thunder from the mountain-gloom
Wakening the sleeping echoes; so sublime
Was that old man, so plainly eloquent
His untaught tongue, though something of a lisp
(Natural defect), and a slight stutter too,
(Haply occasioned by some slight attack,
Harmless, if not renewed, of apoplex),
Rendered his utterance most peculiar;
So that a stranger, had he heard that voice
Once only, and then travelled into lands
Beyond the ocean, would on his return,
Meet where they might, have known that curious voice
Of lisp and stutter, yet I ween withal
Graceful, and breathed from an original mind.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE ROMANCE OF HISTORY

### WALTER SCOTT: THE WAVERLEY NOVELS

THE years 1814-1824 were the most brilliant and prosperous in Scott's literary career. They opened with the publication of *Waverley*. As to the success of that novel it is well to cite Lockhart's remarks:

In returning to *Waverley*, I must observe most distinctly that nothing can be more unfounded than the statement which has of late years been frequently repeated in memoirs of Scott's life, that the sale of the first edition of this immortal Tale was slow. It appeared on the 7th of July, and the whole impression (1000 copies) had disappeared within five weeks; an occurrence then unprecedented in the case of an anonymous novel, put forth at what is called among publishers "the dead season." A second edition of 2000 copies was at least projected by the 24th of the same month; that appeared before the end of August, and it too had gone off so rapidly, that when passing through Edinburgh, on his way from the Hebrides, he found Constable eager to treat, on the same terms as before, for a third of 1000 copies. This third edition was published in October, and when a fourth of the like extent was called for in November, I find Scott writing to John Ballantyne: "I suppose Constable won't quarrel with a work on which he has netted £612 in four months, with a certainty of making it £1000 before the year is out"; and in fact, owing to the diminished expense of advertising, the profits of this fourth edition were to each party £440. To avoid recurring to these details, I may as well state at once, that a fifth edition of 1000 copies appeared in January 1815; a sixth of 1500 in June 1816; a seventh of 2000 in October 1817, and an eighth of 2000 in April 1821; that in the collective editions, prior to 1829, 11,000 were disposed of; and that the sale of the current edition with notes, begun in 1829, has already reached 40,000 copies. Well might Constable regret that he

had not ventured to offer £1000 for the whole copyright of *Waverley*.[1]

The rest of the Waverley series of novels, published up to the catastrophe of 1826, most of which met with nearly as much financial success as the first, some with even more, appeared in the following order:

1815.—*Guy Mannering*
1816.—*The Antiquary*
*Tales of My Landlord* (First Series) { *Black Dwarf*, *Old Mortality*
1817.—*Rob Roy*
1818.—*Tales of My Landlord* (Second Series) { *Heart of Midlothian*
1819.—*Tales of My Landlord* (Third Series) { *Bride of Lammermoor*, *Legend of Montrose*
*Ivanhoe*
1820.—*The Monastery*
*The Abbot*
1821.—*Kenilworth*
*The Pirate*
1822.—*The Fortunes of Nigel*
1823.—*Peveril of the Peak*
*Quentin Durward*
*St. Ronan's Well*
1824.—*Redgauntlet*
1825.—*Tales of the Crusaders* { *Talisman*, *The Betrothed*

In 1815 Scott was presented to the Prince Regent, and made the personal acquaintance of Byron. A little later in the year he went to the Continent to visit the field of Waterloo, and after his return to Abbotsford published his poem of that name. He also wrote *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, which were published at the beginning of 1816. *Harold the Dauntless*, begun in 1815, did not appear till January 1817, about which time Scott planned and wrote a play called *The Doom of Devorgoil*; this, however, was never acted. In 1818 he accepted the offer of a baronetcy, and sold all his existing copyrights to Constable for £12,000; the money being required to meet the expenses he had incurred in the

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xxxiii.

building of Abbotsford, and for the purchase of new land. During the composition of *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *A Legend of Montrose* in 1819 he suffered great agony from cramp in the stomach, which first attacked him in 1817. The pain was so excruciating that he was unable to write, and almost the whole text of the stories just mentioned, and of *Ivanhoe*, was taken down from dictation. In 1820 he received from each of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge the offer of the honorary degree of D.C.L., but, being prevented from leaving Scotland, he was unable to accept it. A second sale of copyrights in 1821 brought him £5500, which, with the proceeds of the novels themselves—viz. *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, *Ivanhoe*, and *Kenilworth*,—made his gains for little more than a year's work amount to nearly £16,000. Being still in the full tide of invention, he evidently anticipated clearing at least £30,000 on novels to come, for which Constable, on his side, was quite ready to sign bargains and grant bills; and as large sums were sunk on the improvements at Abbotsford, grave embarrassments were thus prepared for him in the future.

Not long afterwards he was honoured by the dedication to him of Byron's *Cain*. In the early months of 1822 he occupied himself enthusiastically with superintending the repairs of Melrose Abbey, and took a leading part in the reception of George IV. at Edinburgh, a gorgeous ceremonial contrasting oddly with a visit paid him at the same time by the simple-minded Crabbe, for whose poetry he had the highest admiration, and whom he had repeatedly invited to stay with him at Abbotsford. Symptoms of apoplexy showed themselves in him towards the close of this year, but he was still able to continue his literary labour, and his affairs remained apparently prosperous. By a third sale of copyrights in 1823 he obtained £5500, and in 1824 he prepared for the press the second edition of his *Swift*, the first edition having been issued in 1814. He was much affected by the death in this year of Byron, to whose genius he paid a fine

tribute in Ballantyne's paper, *The Weekly Journal.* He wrote little fiction, however, giving up most of his time to the decoration of Abbotsford, where he also buried his favourite dog, Maida, who died in October, and was commemorated by Scott in a Latin epitaph, interesting alike in itself and as a monument of his imperfect scholarship:

> Maidae marmoreâ dormis sub imagine, Maida,
> ad jānuam domini sit tibi terra levis.[1]

On the 17th of January 1826 came news that brought home to Scott a conviction of his financial ruin. Hurst and Robinson, a firm of London booksellers with which Constable was in close connection, suffered a bill to come back upon the latter which he was unable to meet. The position was this. Scott's fortunes had been long associated with those of John and James Ballantyne, who carried on a trade not only of printing but of bookselling. Neither of them was properly qualified for their task; John was intemperate, and James's interest in the double business was either exclusively aesthetic or exclusively literary. Constable, as has been already said, had come to the rescue of the two brothers in the bookselling part of the trade; but when John Ballantyne died in 1821, leaving his affairs in disorder, the discovery of this made no difference, either with his brother or with Scott, in their method of supervising the work of the firm. Constable, though a man of great industry and shrewdness, was of an extremely sanguine temperament, which led him, counting on Scott's invention as inexhaustible, into rash money dealings. When the speculative mania, which had for several years been inflating the imagination of the country, ended in the crisis of 1825, the firm collapsed in consequence of the failure of Hurst and Robinson; and Scott was brought face to face with bankruptcy. His heroic struggle to meet his responsibilities is fully described in Lockhart's biography, and need only be mentioned here in so far as it illustrates his extraordinary hold on the national imagination.

[1] Lockhart was the actual author of the false quantity. See his *Life of Scott*, chap. lx.

At Christmas 1827 he met his creditors.

"A dividend of six per cent," says Lockhart, "was paid on their whole claims. The result of their high-hearted debtor's exertions between January 1826 and January 1828 was in all very nearly £40,000. No literary biographer, in all likelihood, will ever have such another fact to record. The creditors unanimously passed a vote of thanks for the indefatigable industry which had achieved so much for their behoof."[1]

The works by which Scott accomplished this astonishing feat were *Woodstock*, published in June 1826; *The Life of Buonaparte*, published in June 1827; *Chronicles of the Canongate* (First Series), November 1827; and *Tales of a Grandfather* (First Series), December 1827. Following these came *The Fair Maid of Perth* and *Tales of a Grandfather* (Second Series), 1828; *Anne of Geierstein*, *History of Scotland*, vol. i. for *Lardner's Cyclopædia*, and *Tales of a Grandfather* (Third Series), 1829; *Letters on Demonology*, *Tales of a Grandfather* (Final Series), *History of Scotland*, vol. ii. 1830. As the result of these gigantic exertions, the amount of the Ballantynes' debt was again largely reduced.

"The meeting of trustees and creditors," says Lockhart, "took place on the 17th [December 1830]. Mr. George Forbes (brother to the late Sir William) in the chair. There was then announced another dividend on the Ballantyne estate of three shillings in the pound—thus reducing the original amount of the debt to about £54,000. . . . The meeting was numerous—and, not contented with a renewed vote of thanks to their debtor, they passed unanimously the following resolution, which was moved by Mr. (now Sir James) Gibson-Craig, and seconded by the late Mr. Thomas Allan—both, by the way, leading Whigs:—'That Sir Walter Scott be requested to accept of his furniture, plate, linen, paintings, library, and curiosities of every description, as the best means the creditors have of expressing their very high sense of his most honourable conduct, and in grateful acknowledgment for the unparalleled and most successful exertions he has made, and continues to make, for them.'"[2]

Scott had dreamed of clearing off the whole debt in two years more. But this was not to be. To save his

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. lxxiv.
[2] *Ibid.* chap. lxxix.

honour he had sacrificed his life. In February 1830 he had a paralytic seizure, followed in November by a fit of apoplexy, and in April 1831 by another of apoplectic paralysis. Nevertheless in May 1831 he resumed, and endeavoured to recast, his romance *Count Robert of Paris*, which he had begun in 1830; he made also a beginning of *Castle Dangerous*, both stories being published together in November 1831. Though scarcely able to move, he embarked on board the frigate *Barham* in October 1831, and was taken for a cruise to Malta, where he stayed till December, and then visited Naples. Thence, in April 1832, he moved to Rome, which he left in May, passing through Florence, Venice, Munich, Ulm, Heidelberg, to Frankfort, and from that city down the Rhine to Nimeguen, where he was once more attacked by apoplexy. Conveyed to London, which he reached on the 13th of June, he was carried thence to Abbotsford, where he lingered till the 21st of September, when he died, and was buried at the Abbey of Dryburgh, "in the sepulchre of his ancestors," on the 26th of the same month.

If Aristotle was right in classifying as poetry the Mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus,[1] though written in prose, a History of English Poetry can hardly exclude a consideration of the growth of Romantic Fiction. From very early times two separate and opposing types have been employed by the professors of the art of story-telling—the novel and the romance. Both of these aim at imitating social action, character, and sentiment, but the conceptions of nature and society that they severally embody are so antagonistic as to suggest what is actually the case—that they are the offspring of minds belonging to different races, different ranks of society, and different stages of civilisation. The novel (*novella*) imitates the actions and characters of real life and contemporary experience; the persons who figure in it generally belong to the middling classes of the community; the tone of its sentiment is often satirical and even cynical. The romance (*roman*), on the

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, i. 6-7.

contrary, carries the imagination into some past, possibly quite ideal, age; the actors in it are of lofty station, and the sentiments to which they give expression have a chivalrous, even a poetic cast. The explanation of this violent contrast of character is, that one mode of fiction represents the Roman and the other the German strain in the Empire of Charlemagne and in the modern imagination.

The novel, of which the tales in the *Decameron* may be regarded as the earliest type, and which is plainly a development of the more ancient *fabliau*, has its root in the civic life of antiquity, and reflects the spirit of the municipal institutions of the Roman Empire which, surviving the barbarian invasion, were preserved by Charlemagne in his capacity of Emperor of the West. But the romance, as we find it exemplified in the stories of the Knights of Charlemagne and Arthur, as well as in the tales of later date, embodies the spirit of chivalry, originating in the feudal system, and employed by the founder of the Holy Roman Empire as an instrument for maintaining order in the distant dominions subdued by the arms of his Frankish followers.

The lines of the divergent traditions thus started are continued in all subsequent ages, and the primary characteristics of the novel or the romance are found to prevail, according as the Roman genius of the Renaissance or the Teutonic genius of Feudalism obtains the upper hand in the administration of European affairs. Thus during the whole period of the Crusades, while the ecclesiastical and feudal régime, developed in the Holy Roman Empire, was in its fullest vigour, romance dominated the sphere of fiction. Now romance, as its name indicates, in the beginning, simply meant *history* in the romance tongue, as distinguished from history in Latin. In an early chapter of this work I endeavoured to trace the various stages of the development of mediaeval Romance.[1] Beginning with the metrical songs of the Minstrels in the *Chansons de Geste*, I showed how in time the historic element in these was gradually overlaid by the

[1] Vol. i. pp. 437-45.

fictitious arts of the professional story-teller. The *trouvères* introduced into their tales love-plots, the models of which they found in the Greek novels of the later Empire; but they were careful to join to these a representation of manners and sentiments proper to the Catholic religion and the still universal system of Teutonic chivalry. The romance of *Tristan*, for example, as composed by Chrestien de Troyes, was a faithful mirror of knightly ethics according to the standard recognised in the days of the Crusades. In order to make the narrative more life-like and interesting, these legendary tales of the Knights of Arthur and Charlemagne were soon reduced to prose, and combined with such conceptions of History as are embodied in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The various editors of Malory's History of King Arthur, as late as 1634, regard the story of the King as faithfully historical, and up to the reign of Henry VII. it was venerated as a repository of chivalrous ethics. Caxton, for example, says, in his Prologue to the History (1485):

Then al these things forsayd aledged, I coude not wel denye but that there was suche a noble Kyng named Arthur, and reputed one of the IX worthy, and fyrst and chyef of the cristen men, and many noble volumes be made of hym and of his noble knyghtes in Frensshe, which I have seene and redde beyonde the see, which been not had in our maternal tongue, but in Walsshe ben many, and also in Frensshe, and somme in Englysshe, but no where nygh alle. Wherfore suche as have late ben drawen oute bryefly into Englysshe, I have, after the symple connyng that God hathe sente to me, under the favour and correctyon of al noble lordes and gentylmen, enprysed to enprynte a book of the noble hystoryes of the said Kynge Arthur, and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a copye unto me delyvered, whyche copye Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frennshe, and reduced it into Englysshe. And I, accordying to my copy, have doone sette it in enprynte, to the entente that noblemen may see and lerne the noble acts of chyvalrye, the jentyl and vertuous dedes, that some knyghtes, used in tho dayes by whyche they came to honoure, and how they that were vycious were punysshed and often put to shame and rebuke, humbly byseching al noble lordes and ladyes, wyth

al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembrance, and to folowe the same.

*The History of King Arthur* might indeed have served as a standard of manners and morals for Catholic Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But as, on the one hand, the life of chivalry decayed, in the midst of local anarchy, and, on the other, the necessity of strengthening the authority of the Crown in each independent nation became more apparent, the fictitious representation of society in the old romances lost its verisimilitude. A new class of romantic "history" came into fashion, the heroes of which were the offspring of abstract fancy, and were placed by their creators in imaginary situations constructed solely with a view to gratify the public craving for marvel and mystery. Such was the essential character of the numerous romances which strove emulously with each other to outdo the extravagances first popularised by *Amadis of Gaul*, until the *coup de grâce* was finally given to them by Cervantes.

When the mediaeval arrangements of European society gradually gave place to the Monarchical order established in the different independent nations, the decline in the historic principles of romance was accompanied by a revival of the realistic manner peculiar to the novel. This was naturally encouraged by the sovereigns of each country, whose interests were opposed to the feudal privileges of their noble vassals, and it harmonised no less with the spirit of the Classical Renaissance, which was beginning everywhere to exert its civil influence against the ecclesiastical and feudal traditions inherited from the universal Empire of Charlemagne. It is moreover observable that, whenever the Renaissance makes its entry into one of the western kingdoms of Europe, a conflict follows between the tastes encouraged by it and those which are nourished on the old chivalrous tradition, and that the advocates of the latter are usually to be found in the ranks of the old aristocracy and

gentry ; whereas classical innovations and fictions imitating actual life are mainly promoted by Court circles. Thus in Spain the ideas of poor Don Quixote were evidently shared by a large class of country gentlemen, whose love for the romances of the Amadis class was equalled by their disdain of the "picaresque" novels favoured in the cities and at Court. So again, in France, the passion for romance is illustrated in D'Urfé's *Astrée* and da Calprenède's *Cassandra*, the favourite reading of the aristocracy ; while, at a later date, the Hôtel Rambouillet became the centre equally of the Frondist intrigues of the feudal nobility and of the romantic conceits of the Scudérys ; a taste which the Court, aided by what may be called the literary *Tiers État*, encountered with the realism of the *fabliau*, variously embodied in the tales of La Fontaine, the dramatic satires of Molière, and (somewhat later) the "picaresque" adventures of Gil Blas.

In England, where the struggle between the civil and feudal elements in the institutions of the Middle Ages was longer and more equally sustained than on the Continent, the progress of Romance kept pace with the political development of the people. During the semi-absolutism of Elizabeth's reign a love for the splendid ceremonials of knighthood survived, and the ideals of chivalry were expounded in the *Arcadia* of Sir Philip Sidney and in Spenser's *Faery Queene*. The literature of the first half of the seventeenth century showed, on the other hand, the advance of the Republican and Classical spirit of the Renaissance. But, during the temporary Monarchical reaction of the Restoration era, the spirit of feudalism once more found a dim mirror in the taste for the feeble imitations of French romances produced by the Earl of Orrery and Mrs. Aphra Behn.

By the triumph of the Constitutional movement in the Revolution of 1688, a compromise was effected in the sphere of fiction as in the region of politics ; but though the struggle between the Classic and Romantic parties was transformed in appearance, it was continued in principle. If ideal knights and legendary heroes

vanished from the pages of fiction, they were replaced, by Richardson and his female disciples, with the figures of faultless modern noblemen and gentlemen, like Sir Charles Grandison or Lord Orville. In direct opposition to the romantic practice, Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, embodied the realistic spirit of the Renaissance; while Smollett, following in the footsteps of Le Sage, adapted the principle of the old *fabliau* to modern circumstances. A third species of novel, half-classic, half-romantic, was invented by Sterne, who, in *Tristram Shandy*, turned the light of humorous and sentimental reflection on the eccentricities of character and the pedantries of scholasticism bequeathed to modern society from the Middle Ages.

The first English pioneer of modern romantic prose fiction was free from all suspicion of Sentimentalism. As I have already shown, the moving spring of Horace Walpole's aesthetic experiments was Ennui:[1] his taste was of that aristocratic type which, weary of political intrigue, and sated with the conventions of fashion, sought to obtain relief from its own self-consciousness in the pursuit of artistic curiosities. The Gothic principle of liberty, in opposition to the classic principle of order, attracted him because, from its long suppression, it had an air of novelty, and he applied it in a dilettante spirit alike to architecture and fiction. When he first published *The Castle of Otranto*, he pretended that the book was a translation of an old Italian romance, probably written about the beginning of the sixteenth century, with a view "to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions."

"This solution of the author's motives is, however," he continues, "offered as a mere conjecture. Whatever his views were, or whatever effects the execution of them might have, this work can only be laid before the public at present as a matter of entertainment. Even as such, some apology for it is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromances, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was

[1] Vol. v. p. 361.

not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the manner of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them."[1]

There is much resemblance in this to Tasso's apology for introducing into his *Jerusalem* the element of magic;[2] the difference being that Walpole's excuses were made to the rationalism of English readers in the eighteenth century, and Tasso's to the Inquisition of the sixteenth. Scott, with a generous enthusiasm for a writer whom he regarded as his progenitor in fiction, tries to credit Walpole with motives higher than the latter himself professed. "It was his object," says he, "to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the feudal times, as might actually have existed." It is true that in the Preface to the second edition of his romance, after confessing to the deception he had practised in pretending the tale to be ancient, Walpole says:

> The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds [of romance, the ancient and the modern]. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; to make them think, speak, and act as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions.

But in truth "the rules of probability" are no more observed in the character-drawing of *The Castle of Otranto* than in its supernatural action. The crude and childish "situations," brought about by the incredible incidents recorded, prevent the representation of anything like nature in the conduct of the *dramatis personae*, and if the talk of the servants, on which the author piques himself, be like life, this natural effect counts for nothing in the impossible texture of the whole story. Walpole, appealed—as he admitted in his first edition—to the

[1] Walpole's preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*.

[2] See vol. iii. pp. 114-15, and vol. v. pp. 7-8.

craving for mystery and marvel deeply rooted in human nature; and inasmuch as there were then, as there are perhaps even to-day, plenty of readers ready to be pleased with "miracles, visions, necromances, dreams, and other preternatural events"—with gigantic helmets self-transported through the air to crush through palace-roofs, or pictures capable of sighing and walking out of their frames—he did not appeal in vain.

In his attempt to domesticate mystery and Gothic manners he was followed by a crowd of imitators, of whom the only ones that require notice are Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. The former (1764-1823) possessed considerable powers of word-painting, and, besides delighting her readers' imagination with all the mediaeval apparatus of Castles, Abbeys, Dungeons, and Apparitions, loved to fill her pages with long descriptions of natural scenery. Lewis (1775-1818) relied more on the public craving for horrors, which he endeavoured to satisfy by outdoing the Germans, with whose literature he was well acquainted, in representations of feudal villains and blood-curdling spectres. The titles of his romances—*The Monk*, *Feudal Tyrants*, *Romantic Tales*, *Tales of Terror*, etc.—suggest the character of his compositions, which are considered by a contemporary biographer to have "placed him in the foremost rank among the delineators of the marvellous and terrific." But neither Horace Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, nor the author of *The Monk* attempted to penetrate to the spirit of mediaeval life beyond the mere external shell of marvellous incident. Haunted by the rationalising genius of the eighteenth century, they were unable to recall the spirit of the past in the true poetic temper; and the coldness of their conceptions may be judged by Walpole's critical canon as to the novelist's self-conscious attitude towards superstitions: "He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them." The actors in the story being regarded by the author as mere puppets, necessarily fail to arouse the interest and sympathy of the modern reader.

While these early attempts to revive feudal romance

lacked the fire of true genius, a more successful experiment to enlarge the borders of imagination was made in another quarter. The connection of England with the East had begun to interest the public mind in that ancient cradle of civilisation ; and the view of Oriental literature opened by men of such accomplishments as Sir William Jones in England and D'Herbelot in France, as well as by excellent translations of the *Koran* and *The Arabian Nights*, transported fancy into a new world of marvel and luxury. The first fruits of this influence in fiction appear in the romance of *Vathek*. William Beckford, its author, was born at Fonthill in 1761. Inheriting a vast fortune in boyhood, from his father, the celebrated Lord Mayor, and educated privately by an over-indulgent mother, this spoiled child of genius seems to have steeped his fancy at an early age in Oriental romance. The idea of boundless wealth and luxury, placed at the disposal of absolute power, fired his invention, and impersonated itself in his fictitious character of Vathek, the historic grandson of Haroun ar Raschid. Into his representation of the daring impiety, the intellectual curiosity, and the resolute self-indulgence of this Mohammedan Caliph, Beckford doubtless projected all the sympathy of his own disposition, but so artfully was his conception blended with eastern imagery, so accurate his knowledge of Persian manners, and so natural his style, that there is in his narrative no appearance of the improbability which destroys illusion in stories like *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. At the same time a sub-tone of irony, resembling that of Ariosto, and blending naturally with the grave humour of an Arabian story-teller, helps to restrain the extravagance of imagination, and judiciously imparts a flavour of morality to what might otherwise be considered a licentious composition. In this respect, if in no other, Beckford may be regarded as a worthy artistic progenitor of the author of *Waverley*. He died in 1844.

Scott had been largely endowed with qualifications for romance-writing both by Nature and Fortune. He was born with the genius of a story-teller. As he tells us in

his Preface to *Waverley* (1829) his faculty had been exercised since boyhood, and was recognised at a later date by his companions at the Scottish Bar. His vivid imagination, vigorous sense, genial sympathies, and social habits, gave him a ready insight into all the varieties of human character. Fortune had cast his lot in a society which preserved with affection many features of a rude and adventurous past; taste had led him into many byways of literature illustrating the life of that past with a thousand anecdotes, all of which were stored in the receptacle of his prodigious memory. But Nature and Fortune, if left to themselves, would only have produced the genius of an Improviser. Scott himself has revealed to us the inefficacy of his early experiments in romance. The opening chapter of his first novel, preserved in the notes to *Waverley*, is a commonplace imitation of the style introduced by Horace Walpole. *Waverley*, but for a happy chance, might have remained a forgotten fragment. *Guy Mannering*, when first designed, was a story intended, like those of Godwin, to illustrate an abstract tendency of the human mind. A judgment no less vigorous than imagination itself, and a knowledge of Art equal in extent to the intuitions of Nature, were needed to make the "Author of Waverley," what he eventually became, the greatest constructive creator of romance in an age of revolution.

"Creation" with Scott is a word bearing a sense quite different from that given to it in the philosophic theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge. In the work of the former there is no trace of that analytic process by means of which each of the other poets somewhat arrogantly claims to be able to transmute the real properties of an external object. He would never have written, like Wordsworth in *Peter Bell:*

> The dragon's wing, the magic ring
> I shall not covet as my dower,
> If I along Life's common way
> With sympathetic heart may stray,
> And with a soul of power.

Not that he, any more than Wordsworth, hoped to obtain a lasting hold on the imagination by resorting to the cheap conjuring tricks of mystery by which novelists like Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe gained a momentary success in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho.* He knew that, as civilisation advances, it becomes always harder to raise illusions in the imagination, and that whoever would do this must find for his fictions a basis of reality. In his Preface to *Waverley* of 1829 he reveals to us the process by which that romance came into existence. His first motive, he says, was a desire to imitate manners.

> Without being so presumptuous as to hope to emulate the rich humour, pathetic tenderness, and admirable tact which pervade the works of my accomplished friend, I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland—something which might introduce her natives to those of the sister kingdom in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto, and tend to procure sympathy for their virtues and indulgence for their foibles. I thought also that much of what I wanted in talent might be made up by the intimate acquaintance with the subject which I could lay claim to possess, as having travelled through most parts of Scotland, both Highland and Lowland; having been familiar with the elder as well as a more modern race; and having had from my infancy free and unrestrained communication with all ranks of my countrymen, from the Scottish peer to the Scottish ploughman.

But he was conscious also of an inward power which qualified him for success in what he calls, with modest humour, the "Big Bow-Wow strain" of fiction,[1] and which gave him the mastery over a range of thought and creation far ampler than he would have possessed if he had confined himself to the imitation of actual reality. The vast treasure of historical and antiquarian reading stored in his

[1] "Read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice.* That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, and feelings, and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The Big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary common-place things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me" (Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. lxviii.).

memory and illuminated by his imagination enabled him to transport the reader into a world of ideal probability where he could move with perfect freedom unchecked by the captious scepticism of experience. By projecting those types of Scottish character with which he was familiar into the adventurous situations of a past, which was to himself almost a present, but with which his audience had only a vague historic acquaintance, he was able to enchant the imagination with a magic more powerful than even Ariosto could extract from the marvels of the monkish chronicles. His design, in fact, was to combine the chivalrous action of the *roman* with the modern character-painting of the *fabliau*.

As regards the execution of this design, Scott is often blamed for the uninteresting characters given to his leading heroes and heroines. But a criticism of this kind shows a misconception of the principle of his art. Had he made the exhibition of character the first aim of his romances, he would necessarily have spoilt the construction of his story, and would have fallen into the error against which Aristotle so sagaciously warns the tragic poet:

"Most important of all," says that philosopher in his *Poetics*, "is the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now, character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. . . . Again, if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character, and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents."[1]

Scott knew that this principle underlies modern romance even more than ancient tragedy. He kept always in view the romantic practice of the great Italian

[1] Aristotle's *Poetics* (Butcher's Translation), vi. 9-11.

master whom he so ardently admired. In opening the *Orlando Furioso* Ariosto says that his theme is not the acts of a single hero, like Achilles or Æneas, but a multitude of things,

> Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
> Le cortesie, l'audaci emprese, io canto.

Scott, while paying the strictest attention to the organic unity of his stories, recognised the value of romantic contrast and variety.

His heroes, such as Waverley, Frank Osbaldistone, Henry Morton, and Lovell, are no doubt lay figures, as indeed are all Ariosto's knights, but they are necessary for the conduct of the plot; and the art of the story-teller is shown in the skill with which he uses their adventures as the means of introducing his secondary personages—the Baron of Bradwardine, Bailie Nicol Jarvie, Cuddie Headrigg, Edie Ochiltree, and the like—on which his humour and genius for character-painting are so abundantly lavished. At the same time, it is unquestionable that his finest effects are produced in those of his novels in which historic romance is most closely blended with the realistic imitation of character. The Waverley novels fall into four divisions—1. The Scottish Stories of a date subsequent to the outbreak of the Civil War under the Stuart dynasty, comprising *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *The Black Dwarf*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *A Legend of Montrose*, *The Pirate*, and *Redgauntlet*; 2. Historical Tales relating to England, Scotland, or the Continent: *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, *Kenilworth*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Peveril of the Peak*, *Quentin Durward*, *Woodstock*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *Anne of Geierstein*; 3. Tales of the Crusaders: *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, *The Betrothed*, *Count Robert of Paris*, *Castle Dangerous*; 4. Tales of modern life: *St. Ronan's Well* and *The Surgeon's Daughter*.

The great majority of these are admirable in "the structure of the incidents." Regarded merely as a story-

teller, Scott has no superior. Others may surpass him in exciting feelings of wonder and expectation by the complexity of their plots, but no one has equalled him in the beautiful probability with which his narratives pass from their complication to their *dénouement.* Few, however, will question that, in the fusion of the manners, the character, and the diction of the story with its plot, the Scottish novels, representing historical events, stand on a level above the rest. These are the tales in which Scott most completely succeeds in moving the affections of the reader for his *dramatis personae.* Jeanie Deans, Jonathan Oldbuck, Meg Merrilies, Bailie Nicol Jarvie, Dandy Dinmont, Cuddie Headrigg, Edie Ochiltree, and others of their class form a group of ideal friends who, like the airy characters of Shakespeare, are always with us, stimulating us with their virtues or delighting us with their foibles. These, it will be observed, are the offspring of Scott's intimate acquaintance with real life; they belong to the element of the *fabliau* rather than of the *roman* in his stories. Others again, such as Major Dalgetty, Caleb Balderstone, and Elspeth Mucklebackit, seem to be essentially the creatures of his imagination, evolved out of his literary knowledge of mediaeval types of character; but they are conceived with so much imaginative sympathy that they possess all the vitality of real beings.

It is out of these two classes of character that Scott constructs his most profound effects of pathos and humour: the lofty and romantic situation in which he places the persons most representative of the real life of their country gives an air of poetry to the sentiments put into their mouths; and this at the same time is kept within the limits of nature and propriety by the use of Scottish idiom in the dialogue.

The following specimens illustrate the poetic atmosphere with which Scott invests his characters of the middle or lower class in Scottish life. The first is the speech of Meg Merrilies after the gipsies have been ejected from their hamlet at Derncleugh.

"Ride your ways," said the gipsy, "ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram! This day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths—see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blither for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses; look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster. Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derncleugh; see that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane at Ellangowan. Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram; what do ye glower after our folk for? There's thirty hearts there that wad hae wanted bread ere ye had wanted sunkets, and spent their life-blood ere ye had scratched your finger. Yes; there's thirty yonder, from the auld wife of an hundred to the babe that was born last week, that ye have turned out o' their bits o' bields, to sleep with the tod and the black-cock in the muirs! Ride your ways, Ellangowan. Our bairns are hinging at our weary backs; look that your braw cradle at hame be the fairer spread up; not that I am wishing ill to little Harry or to the babe that's yet to be born—God forbid—and make them kind to the poor and better folk than their father! And now ride e'en your ways; for these are the last words ye'll ever hear Meg Merrilies speak, and this is the last reise that I'll ever cut in the bonny woods of Ellangowan."[1]

The second passage is one of description:

In the inside of the cottage was a scene which our Wilkie alone could have painted with that exquisite feeling of nature that characterises his enchanting productions.

The body was laid in its coffin within the wooden bedstead which the young fisher had occupied while alive. At a little distance stood the father, whose rugged weather-beaten countenance, shaded by his grizzled hair, had faced many a stormy night and night-like day. He was apparently revolving his loss in his mind, with that strong feeling of painful grief peculiar to harsh and rough characters, which almost breaks forth into hatred against the world, and all that remain in it, after the beloved object is withdrawn. The old man had made the most desperate efforts to save his son, and had only been withheld by main force from renewing them at a moment when, without the possibility of assisting the sufferer, he must himself have perished. All this apparently was boiling in his recollection. His glance was directed sidelong towards the coffin, as to an object on which he could not steadfastly look, and yet from which he could not withdraw his eyes. His answers to the necessary questions which were occasionally put to him were brief, harsh, and almost fierce. His family had not yet dared to address to him a word

[1] *Guy Mannering*, chap. viii.

either of sympathy or consolation. His masculine wife, virago as she was, and absolute mistress of the family, as she justly boasted herself, on all ordinary occasions was, by this great loss, terrified into silence and submission, and compelled to hide from her husband's observation the bursts of her female sorrow. As he had rejected food ever since the disaster had happened, not daring herself to approach him, she had that morning with affectionate artifice, employed the youngest and favourite child to present her husband with some nourishment. His first action was to put it from him with an angry violence that frightened the child; his next to snatch up the boy and devour him with kisses. "Ye'll be a bra' fellow, an ye be spared, Patie,—but ye'll never —never can be—what he was to me!—He has sailed the coble wi' me, since he was ten years auld, and there wasna the like o' him drew a net betwixt this and Buchan-ness.—They say folks maun submit—I will try."[1]

A third example of Scott's admirable humour, arising out of his intimate acquaintance with the weaknesses of human nature, is furnished in the scene representing the conflict of love and avarice in the bosom of the immortal Laird of Dumbiedikes after the rejection by Jeanie Deans of his proposals of marriage.

While she was thus in an uncertainty, she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and a well-known voice calling her name. She looked round, and saw advancing towards her on a pony whose bare back and halter assorted ill with the nightgown, slippers, and laced cocked-hat of the rider, a cavalier of no less importance than Dumbiedikes himself. In the energy of his pursuit, he had overcome even the Highland obstinacy of Rory Bean, and compelled that self-willed palfrey to canter the way his rider chose; which Rory, however, performed with all the symptoms of reluctance, turning his head, and accompanying every bound he made in advance with a sidelong motion, which indicated his extreme wish to turn round—a manœuvre which nothing but the constant exercise of the Laird's heels and cudgel could possibly have counteracted.

When the Laird came up with Jeanie, the first words he uttered were—"Jeanie, they say ane shouldna aye take a woman at her first word?"

"Ay, but ye maun take me at mine, Laird," said Jeanie, looking on the ground, and walking on without a pause. "I hae but ae word to bestow on ony body, and that's aye a true ane."

[1] *The Antiquary*, chap. xxxi.

"Then," said Dumbiedikes, "at least ye suldna aye take a man at *his* first word. Ye maunna gang this wilfu' gate sillerless, come o't what like." He put a purse into her hand. "I wad gie you Rory too, but he's as wilfu' as yoursell, and he's ower weel used to a gate that maybe he and I hae gaen ower aften, and he'll gang nae road else."

"But, Laird," said Jeanie, "though I ken my father will satisfy every penny of this siller, whatever there's o't, yet I wadna like to borrow it frae ane that maybe thinks o' something mair than the paying o't back again."

"There's just twenty-five guineas o't," said Dumbiedikes, with a gentle sigh, "and whether your father pays or disna pay, I make ye free till't without another word. Gang where ye like, do what ye like, and marry a' the Butlers in the country gin ye like. And sae, gude morning to you, Jeanie."[1]

It was of course artistically impossible to transfer this imitation of the language of real Scottish life into stories where the action, manners, and characters, are carried into other countries and a comparatively remote period. Here Scott had to rely for his representation of external nature entirely on his knowledge of literature; but his reading was so extensive, and was so completely assimilated in his imagination, that fiction in his historical novels never seems to lose the air of reality. Such scenes as those of the Black Bear inn at the opening of *Kenilworth*, or the portrait of Maitre Pierre in the first chapters of *Quentin Durward*, are as true to the typical character of real life as the interview between Louis XI. and Martius Galeotti, the astrologer, is to the lofty spirit of romance. Scott's wide acquaintance with the Elizabethan dramatists no doubt helped him to invent a style of dialogue for narratives of remote times, which, though quite unlike that of common life, seems to harmonise agreeably with the ideal atmosphere of the whole action. The conversation of such far-off persons as Gurth and Wamba or Isaac the Jew, for example, has no appearance of effort or artifice tending to disturb our illusion of reality.

In the creative genius of Scott the first thing that strikes the mind is the vast extent of the ground covered

[1] *Heart of Midlothian*, chap. xxv.

by his imagination. His tales exhibit a portraiture of manners in times separated from each other by such contrasts as those of a nineteenth-century watering-place, like St. Ronan's Well, and Constantinople under the Greek Emperors; and their several gradations help us to pass in fancy over the various stages by which the Middle Ages insensibly lose themselves in the modern era. In this respect he is the faithful representative of his country's spirit. The history of England records the gradual evolution of a society that has preserved its continuity from the Norman conquest to the era in which we ourselves live, not, however, without those violent collisions of opposing principles which afford the best material for dramatic representation in poetry and fiction. As the compromise effected in the English Constitution between the conflicting claims of Liberty and Order has been the result of mutual concessions on the part of the various races and classes of which the nation is composed, so the work of the poets and romance-writers, who are the best mirrors of the national genius, excels by the reconciliation of contrary principles of art. I have already had occasion in the course of this history to dwell on that equilibrium of spiritual forces, combined with onward movement, ideally represented, at different stages and on different levels of our national poetry. The poetic drama vividly illustrates it in the action of *Henry IV.*, and in the combination of such contrasted characters as Hotspur, the Prince of Wales, and Falstaff, representing that equal conflict between the principles of action and reflection, between the spiritual sense of Honour and the Epicurean love of Life for its own sake, which is so marked a feature in the ethical philosophy of Shakespeare.[1] It is reflected again in the remarkable fusion of antagonistic principles,—Catholicism, Puritanism, and Chivalry,—scholastic theology, humanist philosophy, romantic tradition—which constitutes the character of our great English Epic.[2] A similar phenomenon now

[1] As to this point, see vol. iv. pp. 104-18.
[2] See vol. iii. pp. 449-51.

shows itself in the sphere of Romance. The development of the nation has brought us to an age in which the genius of the *trouvère* finds its instrument in prose more readily than in verse. To eliminate the materialising spirit of the eighteenth century—a natural product of the Renaissance—would have been improper in an imitation of the manners of modern society ; on the other hand, the reviving sentiment of the Middle Ages claimed its due share in the representation of the genius of national action.

Up to a certain point Scott found an outlet for the expression of this twofold spirit in metrical compositions constructed on the same principle as *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* But that vein was soon exhausted ; and feeling his way gradually, as in his poems, he invented in the *Waverley Novels* a union of the principles of realistic and romantic fiction. In them, as in the Elizabethan drama, the "age and body of the time" was shown an image of its exact "form and pressure." Scott's own personality is nowhere thrust into prominence. What Hallam says of Shakespeare—"We see him not in himself but in a reflex image from the objectivity in which he was manifested: he is Falstaff, and Mercutio, and Malvolio, and Jaques, and Portia, and Imogen, and Lear, and Othello"—is true, *mutatis mutandis,* of Scott. The noble humanism of his imagination penetrated with sympathy into every period of his country's life, and into the motives of the various personages, who had played their parts in the making of its history. He delights in the exhibition of heroic action, however it may present itself, whether in the person of the Black Knight assaulting the Castle of Torquilstone, or of Jeanie Deans pleading before Queen Caroline for the life of her sister. Cavalier and Covenanter are alike sure of having justice done them in his portraits, be the style that employed in painting the trooper Bothwell or in representing the heroism of the preacher Ephraim Macbriar. His *dramatis personae* are equally at home, equally dignified, equally well-bred, in the Court of Charles II. and in the

farm of Dandie Dinmont. An air of manly independence characterises his representation of Kings, and there is no appearance of condescension or intellectual superciliousness in his pictures of peasant life. While he is evidently in strongest sympathy with the feudal strain still running through the constitution of modern society, he does not exaggerate it above its right value in comparison with the civil order evolved out of the free development of the English Constitution. His social qualities are reflected in his style. Careless, often ungrammatical, his sentences are nevertheless, taken all together, beautifully free, harmonious, and flowing; his facility is the overflow of a great, generous, and gentle nature; and there is probably no writer in the English language to whom the general reader would more readily apply the praise bestowed by Hamlet on Horatio:

> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
> And could of men distinguish, her election
> Hath sealed thee for herself; for thou hast been
> As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
> A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and blest are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
> That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
> That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
> As I do thee.

# CHAPTER XIV

## CONCLUSION

I HAVE now completed the task which I proposed to myself at the beginning of this work, namely, to write the History of English Poetry from the time of Chaucer to the time of Scott. At the outset of my undertaking I resolved not to extend my conception of history beyond the latter period. One of my reasons for this limitation will be at once intelligible to every judicious reader. As we approach the artistic productions of our own times, personal tastes and preferences constantly intrude themselves upon the judgment, and it becomes always more difficult to form those general views of aesthetic right and wrong which are necessary for estimating the historical value of any particular work. We are too near the object to see it in the right perspective.

But I had a deeper reason for resolving to exclude all contemporary poetry from my survey of the subject. The art of Poetry, as I conceive it, is a mirror for the imagination of men living in a society at once historic and free. Its time-honoured forms, epic, dramatic, didactic, and lyric, are so many vehicles for the expression of ideas not merely existing in the mind of the individual poet, but representative of the action and character of those who live in his age and speak his language. Shelley, a thoroughly representative poet of the Revolutionary Era, more than once indicates his approval of this conception of the art.

"A poet," he says, "is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external

influences as excite and sustain these powers: he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are in one sense the creators, and in another the creations of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape. There is a similarity between Homer and Hesiod, between Æschylus and Euripides, between Virgil and Horace, between Dante and Petrarch, between Shakspeare and Fletcher, between Dryden and Pope; each has a generic resemblance under which their specific distinctions are arranged." [1]

In another place he says:

There must be a resemblance, which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age. They cannot escape from subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live, though each is in a degree the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded. Thus the tragic Poets of the age of Pericles; the Italian revivers of ancient learning; those mighty intellects of our own country that succeeded the Reformation, the translators of the Bible, Shakspeare, Spenser, the Dramatists of the age of Elizabeth, and Lord Bacon; the colder spirits of the interval that succeeded;—all resemble each other, and differ from every other in their several classes. . . . And this is an influence which neither the meanest scribbler, nor the sublimest genius of any era, can escape; and which I have not attempted to escape.[2]

Reasoning like this seems necessarily to lead to the conclusion, that, on the one hand, Poetry is the art of expressing imaginative ideas universally existing in any free society, and on the other, as every such society possesses a life of its own, analogous to that of the individual human being, these fundamental ideas are being constantly so modified as to adapt themselves to the thought and language of successive ages. Not only do the poets of any particular period obey, as Shelley says, "a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the age in which they live,"

[1] Preface to *Prometheus Unbound.* [2] Preface to *The Revolt of Islam.*

but this combination is itself the product of circumstances in earlier times, and the poetry which reflects them has —to use the image of Dryden—its "lineal descents" from poets of previous eras. In European Art the great political source and original of these inherited ideas is the Holy Roman Empire. "Christendom from its first settlement on feudal rights," says Coleridge,[1] "has been so far one great body, however imperfectly organised, that a similar spirit will be found in each period to have been acting in all its members." That is to say, the framework of society in most of the States of modern Europe is seen to exist embryonically in the institutions of Charlemagne; and the present order is the product of a gradual evolution, whereby the ancient organism has been transformed by a series of universal movements, which constitute successive Acts in the drama of European History. And as this social action has developed, the thoughts of those who help to promote it have, in every European State, found an ideal mirror in the various arts of expression, and more particularly in the art of poetry.

Up to a certain point, then, it has seemed to me clearly possible, in writing the History of English Poetry, to trace its correspondence with the history of our political and constitutional development. To repeat the words of Burke:

> After all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the groundwork) we may put in a claim to as ample and early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature, as any other nation in Europe. We think one cause of the improvement was our not despising the patrimony of our forefathers.[2]

The history of the Middle Ages can be viewed as a whole, and the history of England, to be rightly interpreted must be regarded as part of that whole. We can watch the evolution of the life of the Holy Roman Empire through a succession of changes from its foundation by Charlemagne to its disappearance in the French Revolution. We see a regenerated European Order springing

[1] See p. 201 above. [2] *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

out of the decay of the universal Roman Empire, out of the vigorous life of the universal Christian Church, out of the unorganised liberties of the conquering barbarians: contrary influences which are combined into a regulated system of Church and State by the allied genius of Charlemagne and Pope Leo. Gradually on this universal Gothic-Papal groundwork, the outlines of independent nations disclose themselves, in each of which there is a tendency to suppress the local liberties of the feudal system by a central Monarchical power, while at the same time the universal Catholic authority is weakened by the rivalry between the Pope and the Emperor, and, in later ages, by the sectarian impulses of the Reformation. Thus, while the ancient feudal-ecclesiastical framework of society is still left standing in every European nation, the internal spirit of the Christian Republic is in all of them vitally transformed, and by the constant action of disintegrating forces, everything is prepared for the collapse of the ancient Catholic *Régime* in the tempest of the French Revolution.

But the disappearance of the political ideals, which for so many centuries in one form or another, presented an external object of reverence to the imagination of mankind, left a void in society which has not been filled.

"Obedience," writes the historian of the Holy Roman Empire, "almost the first of mediaeval virtues, is now often spoken of as if it were fit only for slaves or fools. Instead of praising, men are wont to condemn the submission of the individual belief, to the will or the belief of the community. Some persons declare variety of opinion to be a positive good. The great mass have little longing for a perfect unity of faith."[1]

The principle of cosmopolitan Liberty, which gave the last blow to the life of the Mediaeval Order, has not proved equal to the construction of any social ideal. By the admission of Mr. Bryce:

This ideal of individual freedom which seemed a century ago

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire* (1907), p. 417.

so full of promise to those who had suffered from the despotism of custom and tradition, as well as from the pressure of meddlesome bureaucracies, has not realised all that was expected. Popular government, installed by the votes of a multitude on which the gift of power was assumed to have also bestowed wisdom, self-control, and public spirit, lost much of its credit when it was seen that masses of men were still prone to be swayed by unreasoning passions and racial animosities, still liable to fall under the control of wealth directed by astute self-interest. The hopes that illumined the first half of the nineteenth century have slowly paled; and the nearest approach to a scheme for the creation of an ideal State which has since emerged is that which would entrust the State with the function of superseding private property and allotting to each citizen his share of the means of labour and of the means of subsistence. Material interests are uppermost in the minds of nations as in those of individuals: and the idealism of this new Europe is, so to speak, a material kind of idealism when compared to the old types of perfection in Church and State, as they were set forth by the Catholic Church in the days of Hildebrand or by religious reformers from the days of Arnold of Brescia to those of Savonarola and of Calvin.[1]

The process of transition from the mediaeval order to this modern *régime* is reflected very completely in the evolution of English Poetry. In the course of my narrative, it has been shown how the foundations of our epic and dramatic poetry were laid in the institutions or beliefs of the Middle Ages, and how gradually national forms arose out of them through the political and literary influences of the Renaissance; how, as the national genius slowly strengthened, the civic spirit in Greek and Roman literature encouraged the assimilation of the English idiom to Classical standards; and again how these traditional forms were modified by the revival of suppressed mediaeval instincts and the consequent growth of the Romantic Movement in poetry. In this concluding volume I have sought to describe the varied effects produced on the English imagination by the French Revolution, and the numerous individual attempts made by poets of genius to evolve, out of their own imagination, new forms of the art,

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*, pp. 503-4.

unconnected with the stream of national tradition. But just as the principle of abstract Liberty has proved unequal to the task of building up a fresh social order in the sphere of politics, so, in the corresponding world of imagination, the last result of the Romantic Movement has been a separation of Poetry from the organised course of national life and action. We have seen how this tendency is expressed in the attitude of Keats—the poet whose example, since the early days of the Revolutionary Era, has, beyond all question, been most potent in determining the development of the art—towards the interests of living society.[1] As "the idle singer of an empty day" to small circles of refined sympathisers, the modern poet is inclined, like the story-tellers in the *Decameron*, to seclude himself from the vision of a plague-stricken world in the pleasant gardens of Art. "There the birds are heard to sing, and the hills and plains are seen in full verdure, and the fields, thick with corn, undulate like the waves of the sea, and there are a thousand kinds of trees, and a wider expanse of heaven, which, although it may be angry, does not on that account stint its eternal beauties, that are far more fair to look upon than the empty walls of our city."[2]

Artistic monasticism like this implies a sharp departure from the social and active traditions of Poetry as Shelley conceived it, and as its greatest votaries pursued it through successive generations in the Middle Ages. It would, in such circumstances, be useless for me to attempt to carry the History of English Poetry into our own times on the principle I have deliberately adopted of regarding Poetry as the reflection of our social life, since, by the admission of the most competent observers, the spiritual ideals at present predominant in the mind of the nation are themselves obscure and ambiguous.

[1] See pp. 347-8.

[2] "Quivi s' odono gli uccelletti cantare, veggionvisi verdeggiare i colli e li pianure, et i campi pieni di biade non altramente ondeggiare che il mare, e d' alberi ben mille maniere, et il cielo più apertamente, il quale, ancora che crucciato ne sia, non perciò le sue bellezze eterne ne nega, le quali molto più belle sono a riguardare che le mura vote della nostra città" (*Il Decameron*, Giornata Prima. Introduzione).

Here then I make my pause. But I cannot part from a subject which has occupied so many of my years and so much of my thought, without anxious speculation as to what the future historian of our poetry will have to record of the course chosen by the imagination of the English people. The great centrifugal movement in the life of the nation towards a visionary ideal of individual Liberty has drifted us, with little pilotage, down the stream of our destiny to a bifurcation of the river, and we must make our choice down which of the diverging arms the vessel of the State shall be navigated. As I lay down my pen we are being asked to decide whether or not we will abruptly take our leave of the great continuous traditions of the past. How vital the decision will be, may be gathered from the pregnant words of the historian from whom I have already quoted, and to whose work I desire to pay a tribute of unqualified gratitude and admiration :

> Something more succeeding generations will know, who will judge the Middle Ages more fairly than we, still influenced by a reaction against all that is mediæval, can hope to do, and to whom it will be given to see and understand new forms of political life, whose nature we cannot conjecture. Seeing more than we do, they will also see some things less distinctly. The Empire which to us still looms largely on the horizon of the past, will to them sink lower and lower as they journey onwards into the future. But its importance in universal history it can never lose. For into it all the life of the ancient world was gathered : out of it all the life of the modern world arose.[1]

May the judgment of my countrymen be guided in this matter to a decision consistent with the whole genius of their history ! During the period embraced within these volumes, the unbroken continuity of our national life is reflected in all the changes of our art and literature, and presents for the study of the nation a veritable *πολιτικὴ παιδεία*, a public school of liberty and patriotism. It has been my purpose, as I said when I embarked on my undertaking, "to treat poetry as an expression of the imagination, not simply of the individual poet, but

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*, p. 439.

of the English people; to use the facts of political and social history as keys to the poet's meaning, and to make poetry clothe with life and character the dry record of external facts." If my narrative has enabled any reader to conceive "more distinctly" the gradual and majestic growth of the British Empire out of the institutions of the Middle Ages, or if it should suggest to any poet of our day fresh ideas wherein to show the active "age and body of the time his form and pressure," these pages will not have been written in vain.

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